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INBRIEF
**MANUFACTURING
SECTOR HITS
RO 3.7 BILLION**

Oman’s manufacturing sector delivered robust growth during the Tenth Five-Year Development Plan (2021–2025), with output rising from approximately RO 3.019 billion in 2021 to nearly RO 3.710 billion in 2025 at constant prices, reflecting cumulative growth of around 22 per cent and an average annual increase of close to 5 per cent. The Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion attributed the sector’s performance to a combination of flexible economic policies and targeted initiatives aimed at strengthening the industrial base, improving productivity and encouraging investment in value-added activities. These measures have helped position manufacturing as a central pillar in advancing economic diversification and reducing reliance on hydrocarbons. **DETAILS ON P13**

EARTH HOUR OBSERVED



An activist lights candles in observance of the Earth Hour in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. — **AFP**

**NEPAL’S FORMER
PM ARRESTED
OVER DEATHS**

Nepal’s former prime minister K P Sharma Oli, was arrested on Saturday as police investigate whether he was negligent in failing to prevent dozens of deaths in a crackdown on Gen Z-led anti-corruption protests last September, officials said. Oli’s arrest, which his lawyer said was illegal and sparked protests by supporters who clashed with police, followed rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah’s swearing in as prime minister on Friday and a recommendation by a panel investigating violence during the protests that he should be prosecuted for negligence. His former home minister, Ramesh Lekhak, was also arrested. **SEE ALSO P5**

US ENVOY PREDICTS IRAN TALKS THIS WEEK

ONE INJURED IN DRONE ATTACK ON SALALAH PORT

A SECURITY source has reported that the port of Salalah was targeted by two unmanned aerial vehicles. The incident resulted in moderate injuries to an expatriate worker at the port and caused limited damage to one crane within the port facilities. The Sultanate of Oman reiterates its strong condemnation of these hostile attacks and affirms its commitment to taking all necessary measures to uphold the nation’s security and ensure the safety of all individuals on its soil. Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff said he believes Iran will hold talks with Washington “this week” as the US-Israeli war against Tehran entered its second month. The war began on February 28 when the United States and Israel launched air strikes across Iran, killing supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and sending shockwaves across the globe. A month later, the conflict showed no sign of ending, with US-Israeli strikes hitting two Iranian nuclear facilities on Friday and a journalist in Tehran reporting around 10 intense blasts and a plume of black smoke early on Saturday. The diplomatic hopes came as Secretary of State Marco Rubio left G7 talks in Paris to declare Washington expects its military campaign to prove victorious within weeks. “When we are done with them here in the next couple of weeks, they will be weaker than they’ve been in recent history,” he told reporters.

AIRPORT HIT
Kuwait International Airport was targeted by multiple drone attacks on Saturday that caused significant damage to its radar system but resulted in no casualties, state news agency Kuna reported, citing



A girl sits outside her tent, at a temporary encampment for displaced people, amid escalating hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, in Beirut, Lebanon, on Saturday. — **Reuters**

the country’s Civil Aviation Authority. Kuwait’s fire department, meanwhile, said a fire that broke out in fuel tanks at the airport last Wednesday following a previous drone attack had been extinguished after operations lasting 58 consecutive hours, Kuna reported on Saturday.

Meanwhile, Yemen’s Ansar Allah fighters on Saturday launched missiles at Israel, their first such attack since the start of the Iran war, heightening the risk that a conflict now in its fifth week could expand further across the region. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian spoke to Pakistan’s

Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, whose government hosts a meeting with the Turkish and Saudi foreign ministers on Sunday to seek to ease regional tensions. But there is no sign of an immediate diplomatic breakthrough and the war has spread across the Middle East, killing thousands and hitting the world economy with the biggest-ever disruption to global energy supplies. On Saturday, Israel said it had carried out a wave of attacks on Tehran, targeting what the military said were infrastructure sites belonging to Iran’s government. It also hit targets in Lebanon, where it has resumed its war against Hezbollah, killing three Lebanese journalists in a strike on a media vehicle, Lebanon’s Al Manar TV reported, as well as a Lebanese soldier. **DEFENCE DEAL** Ukraine on Saturday agreed to cooperate on defence with the United Arab Emirates and Qatar as President Volodymyr Zelensky travelled to both countries amid escalating tensions in the region. Qatar’s defence ministry said in a statement on Saturday that Doha and Kyiv have signed a defence cooperation agreement which includes the exchange of expertise in countering missiles and unmanned aerial systems. “We are talking about a 10-year partnership. We have already signed the agreement with Saudi Arabia, and we have just signed a similar 10-year agreement with Qatar,” Zelensky told reporters during an online briefing. “We will also sign a 10-year agreement with the UAE. It will happen within the next several days.” Zelensky had earlier been to the UAE and met President Shaikh Mohammed bin Zayed al Nahyan as the two countries agreed to cooperate in the fields of security and defence. **SEE ALSO P6 & 7**

404 rescued and evacuated as weather system ends today

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

The Search and Rescue Sector of the National Committee for Emergency Management reported 44 sorties since the start of the weather event (Depression Al Masarat) until Saturday, including 38 for the Royal Oman Police Air Wing and 6 for the Royal Air Force of Oman, resulting in 58 rescue operations and 6 medical evacuations. The sector indicated that the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority responded to 254 reports, during which 404 people were rescued and evacuated. The committee affirmed its commitment to continuously monitoring the situation to ensure the safety of citizens and residents



The Search and Rescue Sector indicated that the Civil Defence and Ambulance Authority responded to 254 reports during rains.

during the current weather conditions. The impact of the weather system Depression Al Masarat continued over the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta and Dhofar on Saturday, bringing moderate to heavy rainfall and causing wadis to overflow. Hilal bin Salim al Hajri, Head of the Forecasting and Early Warning System Department at the Civil Aviation Authority, said, “The weather system began to gradually subside on Saturday morning in the governorates of Musandam, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Al Dhahirah, Al Buraimi, Muscat and Al Dakhiliyah. However, its effects will continue in the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta and

Dhofar until Sunday morning.” The sectors under the National Committee for Emergency Management continue their intensive efforts to handle the impacts of the low-pressure system Depression Al Masarat as part of their ongoing response aimed at ensuring the safety of citizens and residents and maintaining the continuity of essential services. In the Relief and Shelter Sector, a total of 533 people have been sheltered since the onset of the low-pressure system. Currently, nine shelters are operational across all governorates, housing 253 people. The Essential Services Sector reported that several roads were cut off in various governorates due to flash floods. **SEE ALSO P2 & 3**

WEATHER SYSTEM BRINGS MORE RAINS, EXPECTED TO END TODAY

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

THE IMPACT of the weather system Depression Al Masarat continued over the governorates of Al Sharqiyah South, Al Wusta and Dhofar on Saturday, bringing moderate to heavy rainfall and causing wadis to overflow.

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The Medical Response and Public Health Sector said that some health centres in Al Sharqiyah North Governorate were temporarily closed due to the impact of the adverse weather. Alternative services have been provided to ensure the continued delivery of medical services. The sector noted that during the recent storm, Ministry of Health facilities received a number of patients who were airlifted in coordination with the Royal Oman Police (ROP) and the Royal Air Force of Oman (RAFO). A total of 17 patients were transferred to hospitals and health centres, including 3 to Al Rustaq Hospital, 5 to Ibra Hospital, 2 to Sinaw Hospital, 1 to Ibbi Hospital, and 6 to the dialysis centre in Jaalan Bani Bu Ali.

Closed health centres included Wadi Andam Health Centre, where services were provided via Samad Al Shan Hospital and Sinaw Hospital; Dima Health Centre, where patients were referred to Dima W'attayeen Hospital; and Mas Health Centre, with alternative services provided at Dima W'attayeen Hospital or Samad Al Shan Hospital. Additionally, Wadi Nam Health Centre had its services transferred to Al Qabil Health Centre and Ibra Hospital.

SEVERAL ROADS CUT OFF

The Essential Services Sector (roads) reported that several roads were cut off in various



governorates due to flash floods.

In Al Batinah South Governorate, the Al Hawqain-Al Haymali and Wadi Bani Awf roads were affected. In Al Sharqiyah North Governorate, the affected roads included Mahlah-Al Jardah, Izki-Sinaw, Adam-Sinaw, Al Mudhaibi-Sinaw, Al Mudhaibi-Ibra and Al Haimah-Mahlah. Roads in Al Dakhiliyah Governorate were also affected, including Matan-Fahud, Adam-Sinaw and Izki-Nizwa. In Al Buraimi Governorate, the Hafit-Sa'a and Sa'a-Qamira roads were closed. Al Batinah North Governorate saw several roads affected, including Wadi Omar, Wadi Al Hawasinah, Suhar-Haybi, Al Fay-Al Wajajah and Wadi Shafan.

Al Zamaim-Mahout road in Al Wusta Governorate was also affected, in addition to Yanqul-Suhar road, Yanqul-Qamira-Sa'a road, and Yanqul-Fida-Dhank road in Al Dhahirah Governorate, besides the Sultan Thuwaini bin Said road and the Tan'am-Hamra Al Duru' road.

Partial collapse occurred on the Kahl-Al Samini road in the Wilayat of Mahadha due to flash floods, the sector said, urging road users to exercise caution and adhere to traffic guidelines while specialised teams carry out repair work.

Meanwhile, the Search and Rescue Sector continued its efforts, with civil defence and ambulance teams in Al Buraimi Governorate responding to reports of people trapped in their homes due to rising water levels.

The teams were able to evacuate and rescue more than 99 people and transport them to safe locations. The relevant authorities confirm their continued readiness to deal with developments in the weather situation, urging everyone to comply with instructions and follow official updates to ensure public safety.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education said it is currently overseeing the repair and preparation of schools affected by the recent weather depression. The Directorates-General of Education in the governorates have been mandated to take necessary measures to prepare affected schools.

In a statement, the Ministry of Education said that the Central Committee for Emergency Management continues to monitor the impact on educational facilities and assess the damage to the educational buildings and facilities.

The ministry clarified that each institution is authorised to either resume in-person classes

for students on Sunday or to switch to distance learning in schools, universities and colleges.

IBRI RECORDS HIGHEST RAINFALL

The Wilayat of Ibbi recorded the highest rainfall amount for Friday and Saturday at 186 mm, followed by the Wilayat of Yanqul at 151 mm, Wilayat of Al Sinainah (143 mm), according to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Water Resources.

The Wilayat of Wadi Al Maawil recorded 135 mm, the Wilayat of Al Buraimi (134 mm) and then the Wilayat of Izki (127 mm).

The governorates of Al Buraimi, Al Dhahirah, Al Dakhiliyah, Al Batinah North, Al Batinah South, Muscat, Al Sharqiyah North and Al Sharqiyah South experienced thundery downpours associated with active downdrafts and hail.

Hilal bin Salim al Hajri, Head of the Forecasting and Early Warning System Department at the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), said that the effects of the weather system will continue on several governorates on Saturday evening and Sunday morning, gradually extending to include the governorates

More than 15 dead, dozens rescued as heavy rain hits Oman

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

While authorities like the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the Royal Oman Police, and the National Centre for Emergency Management deserve praise for their advanced warning of the week-long weather conditions that affected various parts of the country last week, unfortunately, more than 15 people lost their lives and dozens were rescued during that period.

Although an official statement on the total number of deaths is still pending, several lives were lost despite repeated warnings to avoid flowing wadis or flash floods. It is important to note that some of the deceased died while either crossing wadis or acting recklessly, with the majority of fatalities occurring due to vehicles being washed away.

In response to these tragic events, the National Committee for Emergency Management has reiterated the importance of following preventive measures to protect lives. This includes staying home and only going out when absolutely necessary, after confirming that roads are safe to travel on.

Citizens and residents must always cooperate with the competent authorities by following guidelines and instructions to help reduce risks. It should be emphasised that there are penalties for drivers who knowingly risk crossing wadis, such as imprisonment or fines. Furthermore, parents are urged not to allow their children to play outside during the rains or near water bodies due to the associated dangers.

Recent incidents during the severe weather included a child being swept away by a wadi in Nizwa and a citizen drowning in Wadi Bani Khalid. Additionally, two female citizens drowned in a water pool in Ibbi, with one attempting to rescue the other.

In another tragic event, a citizen's vehicle was swept away in a wadi in Manah, resulting in his death. In Musandam Governorate, a woman lost her life after being swept away by floodwaters, while a seven-year-old child drowned in a wadi in Barka.

On the first day of severe weather, a



vehicle carrying 10 people was swept away in a wadi in Barka. Seven individuals were rescued, but unfortunately, three lost their lives.

Additionally, a building in AL Rustaq collapsed on several children, resulting in the death of four children and critical

injuries to three others who were taken to the hospital for treatment.

In response to an incident in Al Batinah South, the CDAA rescued one person in good health after three vehicles were swept away in Wadi al Maawil, while two others tragically lost their lives.

MoHUP launches rapid support for families affected by rains

BALQEES AL ORAIMI
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

In a swift response to the impacts of the recent Al Masarat low-pressure system, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning (MoHUP) has announced that affected residents can submit assistance requests through the ministry's official website within five days of the end of the weather event. The initiative aims to provide immediate support to affected families and accelerate the assessment and remediation of damages.

The announcement coincided with a series of field visits by officials targeting areas most affected or at risk

of flooding in Muscat and Al Batinah South governorates. The ministry reaffirmed its commitment to providing rapid and effective support to affected families, allowing residents to report damages online for immediate evaluation and assistance. The five-day submission window highlights the ministry's proactive approach and readiness to address challenges posed by extreme weather events, ensuring the safety and well-being of communities.

In Muscat, the inspections covered Bausher, Al Seeb and Muttrah, assessing the extent of damage, evaluating the efficiency of rainwater drainage systems and wadi



The ministry reaffirmed its commitment to providing rapid and effective support to affected families, allowing residents to report damages online for immediate evaluation and assistance.

channels, and identifying challenges that contributed to water accumulation affecting roads and public safety.

In Al Batinah South, the visits included Wadi Al Ajil in Wadi Al Maawil and several

locations in Barka. The teams examined residential areas, drainage infrastructure and the level of impact caused by the weather event.

Preliminary observations revealed that some

residential areas located in low-lying areas or along wadi paths experienced water accumulation, while obstructions in drainage channels hindered water flow, affecting roads and public

safety. The inspections also included Sultan Haitham City, where officials reviewed modern urban planning practices in sustainable rainwater management and resilient infrastructure design.

Officials emphasised the need for urgent interventions, including clearing wadi channels and improving drainage efficiency, alongside long-term planning solutions such as infrastructure upgrades, updated urban planning standards, and the use of advanced technologies, including hydrological modelling and drones. These measures aim to enhance city preparedness, reduce flood risks and improve urban living conditions.



The Pakistan Social Club (PSC) organised a special ceremony to honour Khan, whose extraordinary act of bravery saved the lives of two.

Expat hailed for rescuing two

KABEER YOUSUF
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

An expatriate man, who saved the lives of two from a sinking car in the flashfloods during the rains was feted for his bravery by various associations besides the diplomatic mission.

Pakistani citizen Shahzad Khan, who bravely saved two Indian nationals from floods on Wednesday, has already been given a heroic pursuit by both Omanis and expatriates on social media platforms.

Dr Syed Naveed Sajdar Bukhari, Ambassador of Pakistan to the Sultanate of

Oman, said that his bravery showed what common people can do to assist in alleviating the impacts of such natural adversities. "Khan demonstrated exceptional courage and humanity, and risked his own life to rescue the individuals, and it has earned widespread admiration across the community," he said.

"I couldn't think twice while the lives inside the ill-fated car were at the brink of death. While people were taking photos and filming the car which was already half-submerged, I threw myself beneath the bridge where the

car was luckily stuck in the gushing waters," Khan said. When the attempts of the 25-year-old Khan, a blue-collar worker, to break the window glass using his legs became futile, he managed to pull both occupants, Indian nationals, through the broken doors to safety, preventing what could have been a fatal incident.

The Pakistan Social Club (PSC) organised a special ceremony to honour Khan, whose extraordinary act of bravery saved the lives of two Indian nationals who were trapped in the recent flood conditions.

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Tender Announcement

Financial Services Authority announces the following tender :-

Tender name	Tender Number	Release the RFP	Last date for Purchase of RFP	Last date of Submitting the proposal	Tender fees in OMR
Project Management Resources for Digital Transformation	FSA 005/2026	29 March 2026	5 April 2026 03:00 PM	19 April 2026 02:00 PM	40

- Specialized companies interested in participating in the above tender must deposit the tender fee into bank account, and submit payment receipt of the tender along with a copy of the commercial registration certificate and the contact details of the authorized person to the Services & Public Relations Department e-mail : [Tenders@fsa.gov.om](#), hence, we shall provide you with Tender document by e-mail.
- All participating companies must provide a bank guarantee, issued by locally registered bank not less than 2 % of the tender value addressed to FSA , the bond shall be valid for 90 days from the submission of the proposal.
- All bids shall be submitted in tender box at the headquarters of the Financial Services Authority, located in Airport Heights.
- FSA is not obliged to accept the lowest bid or any other bid without any justifiable reasons.

Bank account information :-
Name of beneficiary : Financial Services Authority
Account no : 0423019706330018
Bank : Bank Muscat- Corporate Branch- CBD
SWIFT code : BMUSOMRXXX
Please attach a copy of the deposit receipt

For inquiries, please contact :-
E-mail : [Tenders@fsa.gov.om](#)
Telephone Number : 24823299, 24823133
Timing : 8:00 am to 3:00 pm
Workdays : Sunday to Thursday,

To view

OMAN

SHORT TAKES



Over 10,000 newborns registered in Jan, Feb

MUSCAT: A total of 10,386 newborns were reported in the Sultanate of Oman in January and February this year. The total number of births in January was 5,762, while the total number of newborns in February was 4,624, according to data published by the National Centre for Statistics and Information (NCSI).

The NCSI statistics showed that the total number of births to Omani citizens was 9,254 in January and February, compared to 1,132 births to non-Omanis.

The statistics also showed 1,486 deaths in January and February, including 1,217 Omanis and 269 non-Omanis.

Sohar-Buraimi bridges to enhance road safety



The construction is due to the road’s strategic importance in connecting border crossings.

SUHAR: The Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology continues the implementation of the project to construct five bridges on Sohar–Al Buraimi Road, with the completion rate reaching approximately 19 per cent at a total cost exceeding RO 6 million.

The project aims to enhance road safety levels, improve the efficiency of the road network, and optimise traffic flow on one of the Sultanate of Oman’s most vital corridors, in accordance with the highest technical standards stipulated in the Omani Road Design Manual 2017.

This is due to the road’s strategic importance in connecting border crossings in Al Buraimi Governorate with various governorates across the Sultanate of Oman, thereby contributing to economic and tourism development.

This project is being executed as part of the ministry’s strategy aimed at developing integrated infrastructure and maintaining a safe and sustainable road network, thereby enhancing the efficiency of the transportation system and supporting comprehensive development pathways across various governorates of the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

Oman ready to expand AI governance: Unesco

SUHAIL AL NAHDI
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

THE Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology announced that the assessment of the Sultanate of Oman’s readiness to expand the scope of comprehensive, ethical, and human rights-based AI governance (RAM) by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) serves as a tool to systematically determine the maturity level of the AI system in Oman.

This assessment, utilising gap analysis, allows for the prioritisation of national initiatives based on actual requirements rather than general estimates. It offers insights into strengths and areas needing improvement to create actionable plans with specific timelines.

Furthermore, the assessment aids in unifying national AI efforts under a single framework, promoting consistency among government initiatives, reducing redundancy,



“The evaluation also serves as a tool to promote responsible AI use by involving government entities, the private sector, academic institutions and civil society in a diagnostic process

HAMDAN
AL ALAWI

and establishing an integrated approach covering technical, regulatory, economic, and social aspects. Hamdan bin Mohammed al Alawi, Director of the Department of Artificial Intelligence and Advanced Technologies Programme Development at the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, stated, “The evaluation results enable the development of a clear national road map with practical recommendations and measurable performance indicators. This will optimise resource allocation and enhance the effectiveness of programmes and projects related to advanced technologies. The evaluation also serves as a tool to promote responsible AI use by involving government entities, the private sector, academic institutions and civil society in a diagnostic process.”

Al Alawi emphasised, “The readiness assessment for the safe, ethical and human rights-based use of AI is based on the RAM methodology issued by Unesco.

This methodology, developed after the adoption of the Unesco Recommendation on the Ethics of AI by 193 member states, aims to help countries measure their readiness to develop and implement responsible AI systems in line with human rights principles.”

He highlighted that Oman’s participation in this initiative demonstrates its readiness to transition from endorsing general principles to integrating them into actionable and measurable executive policies. This approach ensures the inclusion of dimensions in an integrated corporate governance structure that provides clear regulatory frameworks, defines responsibilities, ensures coordination among relevant parties, establishes continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and harmonises national legislation to address data protection, privacy, non-discrimination, regulatory gaps related to emerging technologies, and management of risks and societal impact.

Govt’s acquisition is very positive for SalamAir’s growth: CEO

VINOD NAIR
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

The CEO of SalamAir stated that the government of the Sultanate of Oman’s announcement regarding the acquisition of the airline is a positive development.

Adrian Hamilton-Manns expressed that the acquisition, which was announced by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, is very beneficial.

He mentioned that it ensures the growth of both SalamAir and Oman Air in a sustainable manner, maintains balance in the aviation market in Oman and allows each carrier to focus on its core markets.

In a recent interview with the Observer, Hamilton-Manns emphasised that SalamAir is dedicated to being a low-cost airline, sticking to its established model of providing affordable flights to passengers. He expressed the airline’s contentment with the acquisition and extended gratitude to Eng Said bin Hamoud al Maawali, Minister of Transport, Communications and Information Technology, Oman Air, and the team from SalamAir for their efforts in finalising the deal. Hamilton-Manns stated that the outcome of the acquisition is overwhelmingly



“Acquisition ensures the growth of both SalamAir and Oman Air in a sustainable manner, maintains balance in the aviation market in Oman and allows each carrier to focus on its core markets.

ADRIAN
HAMILTON-
MANN’S



positive for SalamAir.

The Government of the Sultanate of Oman confirmed the completion of the acquisition of SalamAir, highlighting the strategic significance of the move in enhancing the country’s aviation system. The acquisition aims to streamline operations, optimise resources, and bolster the sector’s

capacity to support air connectivity and tourism sustainably.

Both Oman Air and SalamAir will maintain their separate fleets, with potential opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing being explored. The government clarified that the acquisition of SalamAir does not involve a merger with Oman Air.

Expert shares tips on avoiding common architectural mistakes

STAFF REPORTER
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

As more people in Oman consider building their dream homes, architect Ola al Naabi stresses the importance of careful planning and design to avoid costly mistakes.

In remarks to the Observer, Ola highlights common errors made by those designing their own homes, including failing to plan for future needs, neglecting the site’s geography and environment, and prioritising aesthetics over functionality.

“One of the most common

mistakes is not planning well for the family’s future needs, such as expansion or changes in the number of family members,” she said.

To avoid these pitfalls, Ola recommended prior planning, consulting experts, studying the site, balancing aesthetics and functionality, and adhering to building standards.

“Smart space planning is the solution,” she said, advising homeowners to utilise every square metre effectively through practical design and multifunctional furniture.



Ola al Naabi stressed the need to control a building’s environmental impact through sustainable planning.

Ola also emphasised the importance of architectural awareness, saying, “Good design isn’t just about the exterior appearance; it includes comfort, ventilation, lighting, and the use of sustainable materials.”

She encourages society to recognise that architecture affects daily life, productivity, and health, and promotes sustainable designs that meet people’s needs without harming the environment.

The architect stressed the need to control a building’s environmental impact through sustainable planning, energy-efficient design,

and green spaces.

“Architecture is not just construction, but a way of life that affects quality of life,” Ola said, adding that some people tend to design large spaces without considering their actual function, leading to significant waste of space and costs.

“My advice: Smart space planning is the solution. Every square metre can be utilised to its fullest potential through a practical design that balances comfort and aesthetics. Using multifunctional furniture also helps to make the most of small spaces,” Ola said.

CRACKDOWNDETENTIONS



Police attempt to clear a flaming tyre during a protest by supporters of Nepal’s former PM Sharma Oli, in Kathmandu, Nepal. — Reuters

NEPAL’S FORMER PM ARRESTED OVER PROTEST CRACKDOWN

KATHMANDU: Nepal’s former prime minister KP Sharma Oli and ex-home minister Ramesh Lekhak were arrested over their alleged involvement in a deadly crackdown on protesters in September, police said. The detentions came a day after Prime Minister Balendra Shah and his cabinet were sworn in following the first elections since the 2025 uprising that toppled 74-year old Oli’s government. “They were arrested this morning and the process will move forward according to the law,” Kathmandu Valley police spokesman Om Adhikari said.

An inquiry commission into the violence found that at least 76 people were killed in the anti-corruption youth uprising on September 8 and 9. At least 20 young people were killed in a crackdown on the first day of protests, which began over a brief social media ban but tapped into longstanding fury over economic hardship. The government-backed inquiry commission recommended during a caretaker administration that Oli and other officials be prosecuted. Its report said it was “not established that there was an order to shoot”, but added that “no effort was made to stop or control the firing and, due to their negligent conduct, even minors lost their lives”.

The commission’s report said victims in 48 out of 63 completed autopsies died of bullet wounds, and that most were struck in the chest or head.

More than 200 people were questioned, including Oli, and a 900-page report with an additional 8,000 pages of evidence was submitted.

“No one is above the law... This is not revenge against anyone, just the beginning of justice. I believe, now the country will take a new direction,” new Home Minister Sudan Gurung, a key figure in the protests, posted on Instagram.

— AFP

POPE DENOUNCES WIDENING GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND POOR

MONACO: Pope Leo XIV denounced the widening gap between the haves and have-nots as he visited Monaco, a millionaires’ playground that is the surprise pick for the first western European trip of his papacy. Arriving by helicopter from Rome as the first pope to visit the principality in nearly half a millennium, Leo was greeted by Monaco’s ruler Prince Albert II and his wife, Princess Charlene, at Monte Carlo’s heliport under radiant sunshine.

Just after his arrival at the tiny principality on the French Riviera, the pope condemned what he termed the widening “chasms between the poor and the rich”, ahead of an afternoon mass before an expected 15,000 people in the Louis II stadium.

In an address in French from the balcony of the Prince’s Palace, the first US-born pontiff launched into an address which touched on the themes of social justice and

inequality dear to his predecessor, Pope Francis. He denounced “unjust configurations of power, structures of sin that dig chasms between poor and rich, between the privileged and the rejected, between friends and enemy”.

Leo insisted that wealth should serve “law and justice, especially at a historical moment when displays of force and the logic of omnipotence wound the world and jeopardise peace”. — AFP

Israeli strikes continue in devastated Gaza, killing 3

THE ISRAELI military killed three Palestinian men in Gaza on Saturday in two separate air strikes, local health officials and medics said, the latest round of deadly violence despite a US-brokered ceasefire that is now more than five months old. Palestinian health officials said one man was killed in an air strike on a car in the Khan Yunis area in southern Gaza, while medics said two adult brothers were killed in Shujiya, a neighbourhood east of Gaza City.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the two air strikes. The military has killed more than 680 Palestinians in Gaza since a ceasefire with Hamas came into effect in November, local health officials say. More than 72,000 have been killed since the war started in October 2023.

The Hamas-affiliated Shehab News Agency said the brothers were killed in an air strike by the Israeli military after an Israeli-backed Palestinian group in Gaza had tried to abduct them. Neither Hamas nor any other militant group has identified the brothers as members. Witnesses said the two brothers, armed with guns, clashed with the



A woman reacts during the funeral of Palestinians killed in an Israeli strike, in Gaza. — Reuters

The military has killed more than 680 Palestinians in Gaza since a ceasefire with Hamas came into effect in November, local health officials say. More than 72,000 have been killed since the war started in October 2023

militia and that they were later targeted by drones. The witnesses also reported Israeli tanks opening fire. Violence in Gaza has persisted despite the ceasefire and amid Israel’s war with Iran.

Health officials in the territory say at least 40 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces since the Iran conflict began a month ago.

Hamas would be required to allow the destruction of its vast Gaza tunnel network as it lays down its arms in stages over eight months under a disarmament plan presented to the militants

by US President Donald Trump’s “Board of Peace”. The plan follows a timeline that begins with a US-backed committee of Palestinian technocrats taking security control of Gaza and concludes with Israeli forces withdrawing completely upon “verification that Gaza is free of weaponry”.

Hamas’ disarmament is a critical sticking point in talks to implement Trump’s plan for Gaza and cement an October ceasefire that halted two years of full-blown war.

Hamas has long rejected calls to lay down its weapons, which are believed to have largely been transported and stored in tunnels under Gaza.

Israel says it will not agree to withdraw from Gaza unless Hamas is fully disarmed first.

A Hamas official confirmed its authenticity. The Board of Peace presented the plan to Hamas last week. Hamas has not commented publicly on it; a Hamas official said the group was studying it. On Thursday, three other Palestinian factions, including Islamic Jihad, issued statements criticising the plan, saying it unfairly prioritised disarmament over issues such as reconstruction and Israeli withdrawal. — Reuters



MISSING CUBA AID BOATS LOCATED

HAVANA: Two sailboats that disappeared while taking humanitarian aid from Mexico to Cuba have been located by the Mexican Navy and the crews are safe, organisers and Mexican authorities said. The Mexican Navy announced a search and rescue mission on Thursday after losing communication with the vessels, which left from Isla Mujeres in southeast Mexico last week with nine people aboard. The Navy said that one of its aircraft spotted the sailboats 80 nautical miles northwest of Havana. The Navy added on social media platform X that it is in communication via radio with the sailboats and a ship is on its way to the area “to provide support.” The sailboats are part of an international convoy that has brought 50 tonnes of medical supplies, food, solar panels and other goods to support Cuba as a US fuel blockade has deepened the communist-ruled island’s energy and economic crisis. “We are relieved to confirm that the two sailboats have been located by the Mexican Navy, the crews are safe, and the vessels are continuing their journey to Havana,” a spokesperson for Our America Convoy said. — AFP

22 MIGRANTS DIE OFF GREECE AFTER SPENDING SIX DAYS AT SEA

ATHENS: Twenty-two migrants hoping to reach Europe from North Africa have died off the coast of Greece after six days at sea in a rubber boat, survivors told the Greek coastguard on Saturday. The coastguard late on Friday said 26 people, including a woman and a minor, were rescued by a European border agency vessel off the island of Crete. The coastguard said that 21 Bangladeshis, four South Sudanese and a Chadian citizen had emerged from the ordeal alive.

Survivors said the bodies of those who had died were thrown into the Mediterranean Sea on the orders of one of the people smugglers aboard the ship. Two survivors were taken to a hospital in Heraklion on Crete, the coastguard said.

Based on survivor statements, the coastguard said the boat had left Tobruk, a port city in eastern Libya, on March 21, bound for Greece, the gateway for many migrants hoping for asylum in the European Union.

“During the journey, the passengers lost their bearings and remained at sea for six days without food or water,” the coastguard stated. The bodies of those who died “were thrown into the sea on the orders of one of the smugglers”, it added. A coastguard said that the craft had endured “unfavourable meteorological conditions” during their odyssey. — AFP

Invitation to Attend the Second 2026 Annual General Meeting

The Board of Directors of the Oman Society of Engineers is pleased to invite its esteemed members to attend the Second Annual General Meeting, scheduled to be held at 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, 07/04/2026, in the main building of the University of Technology and Applied Sciences.

The meeting will address the following agenda:

- The Board of Directors' report on the work completed during the past year, along with the proposed work plan for the new year.
- The balance sheet and final accounts for the concluded fiscal year, as well as the proposed budget for the new year.
- The auditor's report.
- Any topics the Board of Directors deems appropriate to present.

All the above reports will be available at the Society's headquarters for members to review.

For any inquiries, please contact: 24210099 / 98856109.

TENDER NOTICE No. 002 – 2026 - OETI

Oman Education & Training Investment Co. S.A.O.G is inviting a sealed tender for the construction of **Multipurpose Hall for Sohar University at Sohar** from contractors having sufficient experience in relevant field with excellent or first grade.

Tender	Description	Fees OMR	Submission Date
OETI 02- 2026	Construction of Multipurpose Hall for Sohar University at Sohar with total construction area of Approx. 1,675 M2	200/-	30/04/2026

Description	Deadline
Tender Release Date	29/03/2026
Last Date for collection of tenders after paying tender fee	09/04/2026
Site Visit	15/04/2026
Receiving clarifications, if any, from bidders	20/04/2026
Respond to bidder clarifications	23/04/2026
Receiving bids	30/04/2026

The tender document will be ready for collection by the company after paying non-refundable amount of **RO. 200,000/-** via depositing the money in bank or by cash on or before **09/04/2026**. Cash will be collected by **Mr. Saud Al Jarwani**, OETI, Building 20, Sohar University, Sohar.

Provide the email id to be sent along with the copy of the receipt. For Bank Transfers our account details as below:

Beneficiary : **Oman Education & Training Investment Company SAOG**
Account No : **002020004442**
Bank : **Bank Sohar**
Branch : **Sohar Branch, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman**
Swift Code : **BSHROMRU**

Please send the transfer receipt to **sjarwani@oeti.om** to receive the tender documents in CD or USB.

Tenders offers must be submitted online (softcopy with password protected) or in closed envelopes sealed, delivered at the OETI premises, tender number shall be written only on the envelope, no indication shall be made, and deadline for submission of offers is **30/04/2026 @ 14:00 hours**.

Tender should be addressed to CEO, OETI Office submitted to **Mr. Saud Al Jarwani** as given below during office hours **08:00 to 15:30 Sunday to Thursday**.

CEO OETI Office
Building 20, Sohar University Campus
P.O Box 44, P.C. 311, Sohar, Sultanate of Oman.
Telephone: 26850100, Ext.: 450 / 612



A man points at a building damaged by Israeli strikes, in Beirut's southern suburbs. — Reuters

IRAN SAYS
DOZENS DEAD

Iran said that US-Israeli strikes hit multiple residential areas, killing more than a dozen.

IRAN TARGETS
US SHIP

“A logistics vessel supporting the aggressive US army was targeted by the armed forces of Iran.

PAKISTAN TO
HOST TALKS

Foreign ministers from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Egypt will meet in Islamabad for war talks.

KUWAIT AIRPORT
BADLY DAMAGED

The radar system at Kuwait's international airport was heavily damaged in a drone attack.

YEMENIS ATTACK
ISRAEL

Yemen's Ansar Allah claimed their first strike on Israel after the group threatened to join the regional war if Tehran continued to be attacked.

THAILAND DEAL
ON HORMUZ

Thailand has reached an agreement with Iran to allow Thai oil vessels to travel through the Strait of Hormuz.

FIVE INJURED IN UAE

UAE authorities said fires broke out at an industrial zone following a missile and drone attack from Iran, leaving five people with injuries.

ISRAEL STRIKES
LEBANON

Israel carried out dawn air strikes on several towns in Lebanon as Israel, Hezbollah said they continued to target each other's forces.

UKRAINE,UAЕ
DEFENCE
AGREEMENT

Ukraine and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to cooperate on defence.

BLAST NEAR
ERBIL AIRPORT

An explosion was heard near the international airport of Erbil, a city in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region.

ATTACKS ACROSS MIDDLE EAST AS WAR ENTERS 2ND MONTH

CONFLICT BREAKING POINTS

FEBRUARY
28

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei killed in a massive air strike on his Tehran residence. Iran retaliates by closing the Strait of Hormuz, freezing 20 per cent of global oil transit.

MARCH
02

Lebanese Hezbollah group enters the war, firing rockets into northern Israel and Tel Aviv, prompting Israeli air strikes across Lebanon.

MARCH
10

The IAEA confirms significant damage to the Natanz Nuclear Facility following specialised US “bunker buster” strikes.

MARCH
17

Israel kills Ali Larijani, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, in a targeted strike near Tehran.

MARCH
28

Yemen's Ansar Allah group formally declares war on Israel, launching their first long-range ballistic missiles toward the Negev desert.

FEBRUARY
28

The US and Israel launch Operation Epic Fury, strikes a girls' school in Minab, killing 170 people.

MARCH
01

Iran launches hundreds of missiles at Israel and US bases in Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE, causing heavy damage to the Jebel Ali Port.

MARCH
08

The Assembly of Experts appoints Mojtaba Khamenei as the new Supreme Leader, sparking “Death to Mojtaba” protests across Iran.

MARCH
16

A major Iranian missile strike hits a synagogue in Beit Shemesh, Israel, resulting in dozens of civilian casualties.

MARCH
17

Israel officially begins a ground invasion into southern Lebanon to push Hezbollah forces back from the border.

GULF

countries came under missile fire and Israeli forces struck Iran on Saturday, as the war raged into its second month with Washington expressing hopes for progress in talks with Tehran. In a sign that the conflict may be expanding further, Israel's military said air defences responded to a missile launched from Yemen — the first since the start of the war on February 28, and after threats from Iran's allies to launch attacks.

The war began when the United States and Israel launched air strikes across Iran, killing supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and sending shockwaves across the globe. A month later the conflict showed no sign of ending, with Israel announcing fresh strikes on Tehran and a journalist in the city reporting around 10 intense blasts and a plume of black smoke. Emirati authorities said debris from a successful missile interception started fires at an Abu Dhabi industrial zone, injuring five Indian nationals. Saudi Arabia said it had intercepted a missile and several drones, and Bahrain said a blaze caused by the “Iranian aggression” had been brought under control.

Trump, swinging between threats of obliteration and optimistic talk of dealmaking, has insisted the Islamic Republic wants to “make a deal”. Iran's Revolutionary Guards warned they would strike industrial sites across the region, having earlier issued similar warnings for US military bases and hotels hosting American troops.

In Israel, repeated air raid sirens sent people to shelters, including in Tel Aviv where one man was killed and two others wounded, and in the country's north, where media reported a simultaneous attack from Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah. An Iranian missile and drone attack on the Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia wounded at least 12 American soldiers, two of them seriously, according to The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, citing unidentified officials.

US President Donald Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff said on Friday he believes Iran would hold talks with Washington “this week, we're certainly hopeful for it”. Washington expected Tehran to respond to a 15-point US peace plan, he told a business forum in Miami. “It could solve it all.”

One major issue has been the near-closure of the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz, which has sent markets into turmoil and pushed oil prices to levels not seen since the start of the war in Ukraine.

Israel confirmed it had struck the Khondab heavy water complex and a uranium processing plant in Ardakan, while the UN nuclear watchdog said Iran had informed it of another strike on the Bushehr nuclear power plant. Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi threatened retaliation “for Israeli crimes” in a post on X, saying the attacks contradicted Trump's “extended deadline for diplomacy”. Israel's military reported at least five rounds of Iranian missile fire within just over five hours, and a statement early on Saturday said Israeli forces were “striking Iranian terror regime targets across Tehran”. — AFP



Israeli security work at the impact site following Iranian missile barrages, near Eshtaoil, Israel. — Reuters



A journalist stands next to the wreckage of a vehicle during the visit of a car service centre in eastern Tehran. — AFP



Aid groups distribute food and basic supplies to displaced families, in Beirut. — Reuters

PAKISTAN TO HOST TALKS WITH NATIONS SEEKING DIPLOMACY

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan will host Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Egypt for talks from Sunday on the Iran war as Islamabad positions itself as a potential venue for U.S.-Iran negotiations on the month-old conflict. The four countries' foreign ministers will hold “in-depth discussions on a range of issues, including efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region” during the two-day talks, Pakistan's foreign ministry said in a statement on Saturday.

Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said the meeting would seek to establish a mechanism aimed at de-escalation. “We would discuss where the negotiations in this war are heading and how these four countries assess the situation and what can be done,” he told broadcaster A Haber late on Friday.

The four nations have been involved in trying to mediate between Washington and Tehran in the war launched by the US and Israel on February 28, and all are acutely vulnerable to threats to energy supplies and trade routes. Pakistan has conveyed to Tehran a US proposal for ending the war and offered to host talks, with Iranian officials indicating any negotiations could take place in Pakistan or Türkiye.

US President Donald Trump has said talks with Iran were going “very well,” but Tehran denies talking with Washington. Iran has been reviewing the 15-point US proposal, although one official has dismissed it as “one-sided and unfair”. Its demands range from dismantling Iran's nuclear programme to curbing its missile development and effectively handing over control of the Strait of Hormuz, according to sources and reports.

Türkiye's Fidan told an Istanbul conference on Saturday that the world's new “polycentric system” requires a solution to guarding vital



An Iranian child, Amir Hossein, is treated at Mofid Children's Hospital, in Tehran. — Reuters

The four countries' foreign ministers will hold “in-depth discussions on a range of issues, including efforts to de-escalate tensions in the region” during the two-day talks, Pakistan's foreign ministry said in a statement

energy and trade routes. He said Türkiye's high-level dialogue aims to swiftly chart out “actionable steps” to end the war before there is further destruction to the region and global economy. Egypt's Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty will travel to Pakistan on Saturday to meet with his counterparts from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Türkiye and discuss regional de-escalation, Egypt's foreign ministry said. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian has told Pakistan's Prime

Minister Shehbaz Sharif that trust is needed to facilitate talks and mediation on the conflict in the Middle East, the prime minister's office said on Saturday. It said Pezeshkian had praised Pakistan's diplomatic efforts and that the two leaders had discussed hostilities in the region and efforts to end the conflict during a call that lasted over an hour. Sharif briefed Pezeshkian on Pakistan's diplomatic contacts with the United States and Gulf states, it said. — Reuters

CONFLICT INTERVENTION

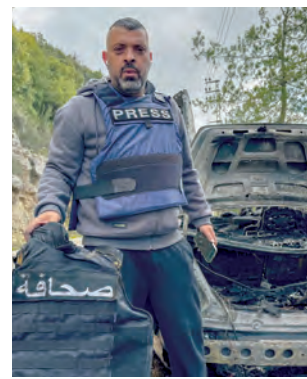
Yemenis enter war targeting Israel



Yemen's Ansar Allah announced their entry into the Middle East war on Saturday by launching a ballistic missile towards Israel, as the world struggled to contain the economic damage of a conflict now entering its second month. The intervention of Iran's Yemeni allies into Tehran's conflict with Israel and the United States will spark concern about disruption to Red Sea shipping, with trade from the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz already choked off. — AFP

FLAGRANT VIOLATION

Strike kills journalists in south Lebanon



An Israeli strike killed three journalists in south Lebanon, their channels and a Lebanese military source said, while Israel said one of them was a Hezbollah member. This came as Israel continued its raids on southern Lebanon. A Lebanese military source said that Ali Shoeb of Hezbollah's Al Mayadeen channel and Fatima Ftouni of Al Mayadeen, seen as close to the movement, were killed in Jezzine, alongside Ftouni's brother, a cameraman. — AFP

REFUTING INFORMATION

Ukraine denies Iran destroyed system depot



Ukraine on Saturday said Iran was lying about having struck a depot housing Ukrainian anti-drone systems in the UAE, after Tehran said it destroyed a facility used to aid US forces. Foreign ministry spokesman Georgiy Tykhy said “this is a lie, we officially refute this information”, saying Tehran “often conducts such disinformation operations”. Tykhy was speaking after Iran's central military command Khatam Al Anbiya said. — AFP

OPINION

Not fine, and that’s perfectly human



DR HAMED AL SINAWI

The writer is a senior consultant psychiatrist at SQU Hospital

ONE of the habits I developed recently during the Eid holiday is to try out new coffee shops in my old town. Most coffee shops have a collection of old books that I often read while waiting for friends to arrive.

In my last visit, I came across a book titled ‘Not Fine and That’s Okay’ by Steff du Bois. The book attracted my attention, especially since it describes situations I come across very often in my clinical practice.

We live in a time where being ‘fine’ is more than a state of mind. It is an expectation and performance. This is why when asked, ‘How are you?’ The acceptable answer is almost always the same: I’m fine.

But what if you are not fine?

In his book, Steff du Bois challenges this unspoken rule. He reminds us that emotional struggle is not an exception to life but a part of it. Yet many of us have learned to treat distress as something abnormal, something to hide and be ashamed of.

In my clinical practice, I meet patients who believe that they should not feel depressed or anxious. This self-judgment can sometimes

be more distressing than the original emotion.

The book’s central message is simple: it is okay not to be okay. But beneath this simplicity lies an important psychological truth. Acceptance is not resignation but the starting point of change.

Modern therapies, such as acceptance-based therapies, emphasise that resisting or suppressing emotions often makes them worse. When we tell ourselves, ‘I shouldn’t feel anxious’ or ‘I must stay strong,’ we inadvertently create an internal struggle, and our mind begins to fight itself.

By contrast, acknowledging our emotional state without judgment can reduce this internal conflict. Saying, ‘I am struggling right now,’ is not a sign of weakness but an act of clarity.

The book also describes the pressure of constant positivity often seen in social media posts and workplace cultures that tell us that we must be productive, motivated and resilient all the time. While these traits are valuable, they can become harmful when they leave no room for vulnerability.

We live in a time where being ‘fine’ is more than a state of mind. It is an expectation and performance

Psychology tells us that human beings are not designed for uninterrupted strength. The nature of life is that we sometimes experience loss, uncertainty and fatigue. To expect otherwise is to misunderstand what it means to be human.

Acknowledging that we are not fine allows us to have genuine conversations with others rather than rehearsed responses.

Perhaps the most important lesson from this book is not about managing emotions but about redefining our relationship with them. Emotions are not problems to be solved immediately. They are signals to be understood. This does not mean we remain passive in the face of distress. Seeking help, developing coping strategies and making changes are all essential. But these steps become more effective when they are grounded in acceptance rather than denial.

In my opinion, we may need to rethink the simple question we ask each other every day. Instead of expecting ‘I’m fine,’ we might begin to tolerate a more honest answer.

Because sometimes, not being fine is not a failure; it is simply the truth.

INDONESIAN KIDS
BRACE FOR SOCIAL
MEDIA BAN

MARCHIO GORBIANO

Bradley Rowen Liu, 11, wonders what he will do with himself once Indonesia’s social media ban for under-16s enters into force on Saturday. As things stand, he spends most of his free time on TikTok.

Several countries have proposed teen social media bans since Australia’s landmark move in December to stop users under 16 from holding accounts on many popular platforms.

But Indonesia is among the first to act as concerns grow over the impact of such apps on kids’ mental and physical well-being.

YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, Threads, X, Bigo Live and Roblox — deemed “high-risk” platforms by authorities in the Southeast Asian nation — will from Saturday start deactivating underage accounts.

Liu, who says he can easily spend five hours a day on TikTok at weekends, said he worries the ban will leave him driftless.

“Maybe I’ll do some other activities,” he shrugged, without much conviction.

“Parents no longer have to fight alone against the giants of the algorithm,” communications minister Meutya Hafid said when she announced the ban three weeks ago.

Like in Australia, the Indonesian rules place the onus on platforms to regulate teen access.

Non-compliance with the ban, which will be phased in over time, will put defaulters at risk of a fine or even a suspension.

Indonesia has not said how it plans to monitor implementation, and the communications ministry did not respond to AFP’s requests for comment. It is part of a global reckoning over the potential harms of social media for minors.

A Los Angeles jury on Wednesday found Meta and YouTube liable for harming a young woman, ordering the companies to pay \$6 million in damages. Britain’s upper house of parliament voted this week in favour of banning children from social media, piling pressure on the government to follow suit. A fellow pupil, 15-year-old Maximillian, said he spends too much time on social media, leaving him feeling “unproductive”. He supports the ban. Some want the government to go even further. Randi Putra Chaniago, who teaches at the academy, said social media — including the surreal AI-generated clips known as brain rot — was a distraction in class.

YouTube parent company Google said the two platforms have already introduced features allowing parents to limit scrolling time.

It said AI tech will be launched in Indonesia by next year to determine a user’s age.

But “blanket account restrictions... will deprive young people accessing YouTube of the protections, parental controls, and security features we’ve integrated into supervised accounts”, it argued in a statement. — AFP

Why do women feel safer in
Oman even during a war?

YOU ’D probably laugh, as I do, if you could hear the concern from friends and family back in the UK when they ask whether I feel safe living in Oman, especially given the current regional conflict.

Even in this time of war, my Omani wife and I genuinely feel safer here than we ever did in the UK. The concerns are always well meant, but they don’t match my experience and the facts.

If you look at the numbers, the contrast is striking. Oman’s homicide rate is typically well below 1 per 100,000 people, compared with around 2 in the United Kingdom and roughly 6 in the USA.

Rates of robbery and violent assault follow a similar pattern. The 2025 Gallup Law and Order Index reinforces this: around 94 per cent of people in Oman, including women, report feeling safe walking alone at night, compared with roughly 75 per cent in the UK and about 70 per cent in the USA.



KARIM EASTERBROOK

The writer is a Former Cambridge School Principal and Author

In Oman, the police are widely seen as friendly and approachable. I have great respect for the British police, even though they have occasionally faced scrutiny following reports of misconduct



Omani women hold senior roles in government, including at the ministerial level as well as in business.

feels calm and predictable.

In the UK, the picture is more mixed, particularly for women, where concerns about personal safety at night remain more pronounced, partly owing to the accessibility of drugs. I have personally had the distressing experience of being mugged and having my watch stolen.

Oman has little street crime, and unlike in the UK, opportunistic theft and violent incidents are rare. Policing also plays a role.

In Oman, the police are widely seen as friendly and approachable. I have great respect for the British police, even though they have occasionally faced scrutiny following reports of misconduct. Public perception is influential, but it does not mean the UK police are ineffective or corrupt. There is also a cultural and religious dimension. Oman has a strong social framework based on Islam, where expectations about behaviour are widely

understood and followed. Public spaces feel orderly.

Western media often promotes the idea that Muslim women are oppressed and therefore at risk. This does not align with reality in Oman.

Omani women hold senior roles in government, including at the ministerial level as well as in business. National events such as International Women’s Day highlight these contributions. Oman’s high ranking in Gallup’s index also reflects strong trust in the police and government. For women in particular, the ability to move freely and feel safe at night is crucial.

Experiencing this sense of safety firsthand, the contrast with the misleading Western narrative is striking. The legitimacy of any government rests above all on its ability to protect its citizens and provide a safe living environment. On a personal level, I feel privileged to be able to live in Oman.

Learning difficulties and the role of society



RAY PETERSEN

The writer is a media consultant

It is estimated, worldwide, that 20 per cent of students have learning difficulties, but that less than 2 per cent have a diagnosis that draws resources and support from governments and educational authorities. Here, if you don't already know, is a summary of our three most rampant specific learning difficulties.

Autism, also known as autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, is not an illness, but a neurological development disorder, or a neurodivergence, that is a consequence, according to researchers, of genetics, birth complications, or older parents. It affects how an individual on the spectrum sees their world, communicates and interacts with others, while also generally taking longer to process new information. Every autistic person is unique in their sensitivity, particularly how they respond to extremes of light, sound, textures and smells.

They are usually intense, with such intensity clear in their need for routine, order, and structure, and in their behaviours, will often exhibit repetitive actions or gestures, while at the same time having trouble with finer motor skills, and appearing uncoordinated. Characteristically, they communicate and interact socially with difficulty, as in initiating and maintaining conversations, due to their inability to interpret social cues, understanding and expressing emotions. They also get tired easily, may appear disinterested quickly and will often 'fade out,' or step back.

On the other hand, attention-deficit/

hyperactivity disorder is, as the name suggests, indicative of its active nature, and being characterised by established patterns of behaviour which can be at the extremes of sociality, such as on one hand having difficulty staying on task, being organised, or being attentive for any length of time. At the other end of the scale, their hyperactivity is evident in their being restless, impatient, in excessive movement and needing to be active, talking too much, and on random topics are common symptoms. Again, conversation and interaction are difficult with impulsive interruptions and intrusions, and an unwillingness to await their turn is evidence of social clue deficits.

ADHD is common among children, and often occurs in conjunction with sleep problems, anti-social behaviours, anxiety, depression, and commonly results in learning difficulties from a young age, classroom and societal disobedience. Significant anti-social behaviours in and out of school, poor grades, and diminishing 'care factors' in terms of meeting familial and societal norms will strain relationships.

Of the three main issues facing education, dyslexia is the third, and is different, as its diagnosis extends mainly to education and work, but for life, and though neurobiological by nature, it is not likely to compromise intellect, but rather to cause frustration until order can be found among the chaos of learning. It is likely to have significantly less outward demonstrativeness than ADHD or autism. Commonly, it affects reading, writing

Autism, also known as autism spectrum disorder, or ASD, is not an illness, but a neurological development disorder, or a neurodivergence, that is a consequence, according to researchers, of genetics, birth complications, or older parents

and spelling the most at school; mathematics can suffer if insufficient order is shown. It is often evident in slow reading and confusing words and letters, though coloured paper and overlays have significantly improved the learner's experiences in reading. They will also be hesitant to read aloud due to issues of phonological awareness, the recognition and manipulation of the very sounds of speech. All in all, dyslexia is a specific learning difficulty, as opposed to being a disability, and those diagnosed with it are commonly still effective learners and achievers, as they tend to commit to the daily challenges of their condition and prove successful in most walks of life.

Statistically, an estimated 1 in 10 children and adolescents globally, or around 800 million, have dyslexia, equally among males and females. Albert Einstein had dyslexia, and half of the current Nasa workforce has it, so clearly it is not harmful, intellectually. Similar statistical analysis finds that around 180 million have autism, while the US Census Bureau's last estimate was that worldwide, 129 million of that age group (86 million males and 43 million females) have ADHD.

Those figures are staggering! Read and absorb this information and then ask yourself, in a world governed by balance sheets and billionaires, how do global educators support and appropriately resource learners who can barely pronounce these conditions, let alone recognise them, manage them, and still live a full life? Maybe you have the answers... I don't.

AI DEEPFAKES BLUR REALITY IN MIDTERM CAMPAIGNS IN US

JOSEPH AX AND HELEN COSTER

As the video opens, Democratic Texas State Representative James Talarico appears to stand in front of a Texas flag, beaming.

"Radicalised white men are the greatest domestic terrorist threat in our country," the US Senate candidate seems to say into the camera. As a voice whispers "white men," Talarico continues: "So true. So true."

But Talarico never filmed that video. Instead, the clip is an AI-generated ad from the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), the party's Senate campaign arm, featuring a computer-altered Talarico reciting social media posts he wrote years ago. The words "AI-generated" show up in easy-to-miss font in the lower right-hand corner.

The realistic video is among a vanguard of "deepfake" advertisements that some campaigns are already deploying ahead of November's midterm elections, taking advantage of AI tools that are improving at a breakneck pace.

The ads are being introduced into a media landscape with few guardrails. There is no federal regulation constraining the use of AI in political messaging, leaving only a patchwork of largely untested state laws. And while social media companies like Meta and X label certain AI-generated content, they have scrapped professional fact-checking systems in favour of user-generated notes.

Politics experts worry such videos could leave voters confused, or even deceived. The stakes are high: the election will determine which party controls Congress for the final two years of Republican President Donald Trump's term, with Democrats seemingly well positioned to capture a majority in the US House of Representatives but facing longer odds in the US Senate.

The ads appear to be effective, political strategists and experts said. One 2025 study, published in the peer-reviewed Journal of Creative Communications, found that people struggle to identify deepfake videos and that their opinions are affected by this type of misinformation.

So far, Republicans appear to be utilising the technology more frequently than Democrats this election cycle, according to politics experts and a Reuters review of publicly available ads.

The Republicans are following the lead of Trump's White House, which has released scores of AI-generated videos and gaming-inspired memes on social media that do everything from disparaging protesters to hyping up the Iran war.

The Talarico ad, for instance, is one of three recent ads created by national Republicans that use deepfake technology - realistic yet fabricated videos made by AI algorithms that have become increasingly easy to create. — Reuters

One month into war, only hard choices for Trump

WITH global energy prices up and his job approval ratings down, Donald Trump faces stark choices after a month of war against Iran: cut a potentially flawed deal and get out, or escalate militarily and risk a prolonged conflict that could consume his presidency.

Despite a flurry of diplomatic activity, Trump ends another week of the joint US-Israeli campaign struggling to contain a widening Middle East crisis as a defiant Iran maintains a chokehold on Gulf oil and gas shipments and continues missile and drone strikes across the region.

The central question now, say analysts, is whether Trump is ready to wind down or ramp up what critics have called a war of choice, one that has ignited the worst global energy supply shock in history and spread far beyond the region.

Trump has told aides he wants to avoid a "forever war" and find a negotiated exit, urging them to stress the four-to-six-week duration of hostilities he has outlined publicly, a senior White House official said, adding that such a timeline appears "shaky."

At the same time, Trump has threatened a major military escalation if talks fail. Trump's diplomatic overtures to Iran, including a 15-point peace proposal sent via a backchannel with Pakistan, appeared to demonstrate an increasingly urgent search for an off-ramp. But it remains unclear whether there are currently any realistic prospects for fruitful negotiations.

"President Trump has poor options all around to end the war," said Jonathan Panikoff, former US deputy national intelligence officer for the Middle East. "Part of the challenge is the lack of clarity related to what a satisfactory outcome would be."

A White House official insisted that the Iran campaign "will conclude when the commander-in-



MATT SPETALNICK

The writer is Reuters Washington Correspondent



NANDITA BOSE

The writer is White House Correspondent for Reuters

The central question now, say analysts, is whether Trump is ready to wind down or ramp up what critics have called a war of choice, one that has ignited the worst global energy supply shock in history and spread far beyond the region



US President Donald Trump boards Air Force One before departing Miami International Airport in Miami, Florida, on Friday. — AFP

chief determines that our objectives are met" and that Trump had laid out explicit goals.

Apparently hedging his bets, Trump is deploying thousands more US troops to the region and warning Iran of an intensified onslaught, possibly including the use of ground troops, if it does not yield to his demands.

Analysts say such a show of force could be aimed at creating leverage for concessions from Tehran but risks drawing the US into a more protracted conflict, with any commitment of boots on Iranian soil likely to anger many American voters.

Another possible scenario, experts say, would be for the US to wage a final major air assault in "Operation Epic Fury" to further degrade Iran's military capabilities and nuclear sites, after which Trump would declare victory and walk away, saying his war objectives had been achieved.

But such a claim would ring hollow unless the vital Strait of Hormuz is completely reopened, which Iran is so far refusing to allow. Trump has voiced frustration over European allies' refusal to send warships to help secure the waterway.

Trump, who has repeatedly

vowed to keep the US out of foreign conflicts, is seemingly struggling to contain the expanding war that he started along with Israel.

Even as he has continued issuing triumphalist assessments, he has increasingly geared his messaging to reassuring nervous financial markets, pressing senior aides to emphasise that the war will be over soon, according to the senior White House official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

But the lack of a clear exit strategy carries dangers both for Trump's presidential legacy and his party's prospects as Republicans scramble to defend narrow majorities in Congress in the November midterm elections. Trump's biggest miscalculation has been the extent of Tehran's retaliation. It has used its remaining missiles and drones to strike Israel and neighbouring Gulf states and mostly close the Strait of Hormuz, the conduit for one-fifth of the world's oil, sending shockwaves through the global economy.

"The Iranian government's bet is they can take more pain for longer than their adversaries, and they might be right," said Jon Alterman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank in Washington.

SPORTS

SHORT TAKES



A scene from the training session of the national beach handball team's goalkeepers.

OMAN TAKE ON MONGOLIA IN ASIAN BEACH OPENER

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbhaluch

Oman's national beach handball team continues its intensive daily training sessions at the sand court of the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Bausher as part of its preparations for the 6th Asian Beach Games, scheduled to take place in Sanya, China, from April 22 to 30.

The team is led by head coach Hamoud bin Salim al Hassani, assisted by Jaber bin Yaqoub al Balushi, with the coaching staff focusing on enhancing both the physical and technical readiness of the players through a comprehensive training programme tailored to the fast-paced and physically demanding nature of beach handball.

Training sessions include a range of specialised drills, including shooting from various angles, handling rebounds, and executing tactical plays designed to strengthen team cohesion on the court. Particular emphasis is also placed on quick transitions from defence to attack, a key factor in gaining a competitive edge during matches.

Following the official draw, Oman was placed in Group B alongside Pakistan, Jordan, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Thailand, Qatar and Mongolia, in what is considered a highly competitive group.

Oman will begin its campaign on April 21 with a morning match against Mongolia, before facing Qatar later the same day in a highly anticipated clash. The team will then take on Thailand on April 22, followed by matches against the Maldives on April 24 and Bangladesh on April 26. Oman will also face Jordan before concluding its preliminary round fixtures against Pakistan on April 27.

The team is aiming to deliver strong performances and achieve positive results that reflect the continued development of beach handball in Oman and reinforce its growing presence on the Asian stage. Meanwhile, Group A includes China, Iran, the Philippines, Hong Kong, India, Sri Lanka and Bahrain.

‘FALAH’ SHINES IN DUBAI WORLD CUP OPENER

RIYADH AL BALUSHI
@riyadhbhaluch

“FALAH” delivered a dominant performance to win the Dubai Kahayla Classic, the opening race for Purebred Arabian horses over 2,000 metres on dirt (Group 1), held at Meydan Racecourse as part of the Dubai World Cup 2026 carnival. With a prize purse of \$1 million, the race provided a thrilling start to one of the most prestigious events on the global horse racing calendar.

Owned by Shihab bin Harib al Busaidy, 'Falah' was guided to victory by jockey Al Mutasim al Balushi and trained by Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Balushi. Competing against a strong field of elite Arabian horses, 'Falah' showcased outstanding stamina and tactical awareness. He maintained a strong position throughout the race before accelerating decisively in the final stretch to secure a well-earned victory.

This success marks another milestone in 'Falah's' impressive career, further establishing him as one of the leading Purebred Arabian racehorses on the international stage. The win is not his first major achievement, as he previously claimed the prestigious His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik Cup earlier this season. In addition, he has recorded notable victories and top finishes in several major regional and international races, highlighting his consistency and high level of performance.

Trainer Ahmed bin Ibrahim al Balushi expressed his satisfaction following the race, praising the horse's preparation and determination. He said: “We had great confidence in Falah heading into this race. Our preparation was focused and carefully structured to ensure he reached peak condition at the right time. The competition was strong, but he showed exceptional determination and quality. This victory reflects the hard work of the entire team, and we are looking forward to more success in the future.”



A group photo of the Sultanate Stud team celebrating their victory with the horse Falah. — Mohammed al Balushi



AHMED
AL BALUSHI
THE TRAINER

“We had great confidence in Falah heading into this race. Our preparation was focused and carefully structured to ensure he reached peak condition at the right time. The competition was strong, but he showed exceptional determination and quality.”



The horse Falah, ridden by jockey Al Mutasim al Balushi, won the Dubai Kahayla Classic race. — Mohammed al Balushi

Jockey Al Mutasim al Balushi also spoke about the achievement, emphasising the importance of race strategy and timing. He stated: “Falah performed brilliantly from start to finish. I made sure to keep him relaxed during the early stages and gradually build momentum. When it mattered most, he responded perfectly and delivered a powerful finish. Winning at an event of this level is always special, and this victory means a lot to all of us.”

The Dubai Kahayla Classic

remains one of the world's premier races for Purebred Arabian horses, attracting top competitors from across the globe. 'Falah's' victory highlights not only his exceptional ability but also the growing prominence of Arabian horse racing on the international stage. With this remarkable win, 'Falah' continues to strengthen his legacy as an elite racehorse, proving once again his capability to compete at the highest level and setting his sights on further major achievements in the seasons ahead.

Oman gear up for West Asia Under-23 Championship

AHMED AL KAABI
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

The Oman Olympic football team will conclude its internal training camp in Al Buraimi on Sunday evening before departing for Al Ain in the UAE to continue preparations for the upcoming West Asia Under-23 Championship, scheduled for June.

Led by national coach Badr al Maimani, the camp forms part of the team's ongoing build-up for the regional assignment, with the technical staff aiming to make the most of successive training phases to raise the players' physical and technical readiness while widening the selection pool ahead of the tournament.

The squad's external camp in Al Ain will run until April 1 and will include an international friendly against the UAE Olympic team on Tuesday evening at Tahnoun bin Mohammed Al Nahyan Stadium. The match is expected to offer



Oman Olympic team prepare for next phase

the coaching staff a clearer picture of the current group and the level of cohesion developing within the squad.

The internal camp, held from March

27 to 29, marked an important stage in the team's preparations. It included training sessions focused on physical conditioning, improving understanding

among the players, and refining tactical aspects related to build-up play, transitions, and defensive and attacking organisation. It also gave the technical staff a valuable opportunity to closely assess the players, particularly with several new faces included in the current squad.

FRESH FACES DRAFTED IN

The squad selected for the internal and external camps features a notable injection of new talent, with several players born in 2005 and 2006 called up after impressing in the Olympic League and Jindal League competitions. A total of 17 players have joined the Olympic team setup for the first time, reflecting a clear intention to expand the player base and assess a broader pool ahead of the next stage of preparations.

In contrast, only seven players from the previous camp retained their places in the current squad. That balance underlines the experimental nature

of this phase as the coaching staff continues to test options and shape the most suitable group for the coming assignment.

These camps come at an important time for the Olympic side, particularly with the need to maintain the players' competitive rhythm following the early conclusion of age-group competitions. That situation has made regular internal and external camps increasingly important in helping the technical staff preserve fitness levels and keep the players in a suitable competitive environment.

The coaching staff will also look to build on the success achieved in last year's West Asia campaign, when Oman lifted the Under-23 title for the first time, defeating Jordan 3-1 in the final on March 25, 2025. With Badr al Maimani once again leading the side, Oman will be aiming to mount another strong challenge and defend their regional crown.

ADIL AL BALUSHI
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

THE FUTURE of Oman national football team is looking very bright following the announcement of Oman Football Association (OFA) on the appointment of Moroccan coach Tariq Sektioui who will lead Red Warriors in the coming phase replacing the Portugal's coach Carlos Queiroz. The move is widely seen as a fresh start, with hopes of achieving positive results and long-term technical stability. Oman Observer met with former players and domestic experienced coaches to identify the most important technical pillars that the new coaching staff should focus on to reach the desired level. The participants agreed that the first and most important step is to build a clear and consistent playing identity for the national team. This should be supported by continuous development, investment in players at all levels, and giving the coach enough time to implement his ideas and achieve targets. The coaching experts also stressed that the upcoming phase will require an integrated work that combines proper technical planning with strong institutional support. This will allow the new technical staff to build a competitive team capable of meeting fans' expectations and returning to regional and continental competitions.

STABILITY IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Jamal Bakhsh al Balushi, former national team player and domestic coach, highlighted that building a clear technical identity is the foundation of any successful team. "The importance of adopting a fixed playing style is very critical as this will ensure players clearly understand their roles in all match situations. The defensive organisation and tactical

discipline are essential, as strong teams are built from solid defending. Reducing spaces between lines and improving team positioning are crucial elements. Improving transitions between defence and attack is another significant technical element which will describe as a key factor in modern football. In addition, the player selection should be based on technical suitability rather than reputation, he said. He concluded his statement by emphasising the need for squad stability, gradual team building, and focusing on the mental aspect by instilling a winning mentality to handle pressure.

BALANCE DRIVE PROGRESS

Hamdi Hoobes, former national team player, pointed out that having a clear attacking identity must be combined with realism, especially as the team has recently struggled with possession without effectiveness. "The need to improve performance in the final third and decision-making, alongside focusing on fast transitions, which often decide matches in modern football.

Also, building a strong defensive system goes beyond the backline, requiring proper pressing organisation and compactness between lines. It is very important to maintain a "spine" of the team to ensure stability, while renewing the squad with younger players to build for the future, especially ahead of major competitions such as the AFC Asian Cup," he concluded.

IDENTITY AND ENVIRONMENT

Oman's former U-17 head coach, Hilal al Aufi, affirmed that every coach has his own philosophy but success depends on building a balanced tactical identity that covers defence, attack and transitions, while matching the abilities of Omani players. "The player selection acted as one of the most difficult tasks which must align with the coach's tactical approach and include a balance between experienced and young players," he said. "The physical preparation is another key element which is closely linked to the level of the domestic league. I advice for stronger cooperation between the national team staff and clubs to improve player readiness. Also, there is a need for continuous communication between the coach and players to build confidence and motivation. In addition, the importance of a supportive environment from the association and media should give the coach enough time to implement his vision and working within a clear long-term plan," he ended.



SEKTIQUI TARIK

Sektioui to push Red Warriors ahead



SPORTS

SHORTTAKES



Raphinha reacts during the Spanish league football match between FC Barcelona and Rayo Vallecano de Madrid at Camp Nou Stadium. — AFP

RAPHINHA TO MISS CL QUARTERS DUE TO INJURY

Barcelona attacker Raphinha will miss their Champions League quarterfinal tie with Atletico Madrid early next month after suffering a hamstring injury on international duty with Brazil, the LaLiga side said.

The 29-year old, who has scored 19 goals in all competitions for Barcelona this season, picked up the injury on Thursday in Brazil’s 2-1 defeat by France in Foxborough.

“The player is returning to Barcelona to begin the appropriate treatment. The estimated recovery time is five weeks,” Barcelona said in a statement on Friday.

Barcelona, who are four points clear of Real Madrid in LaLiga, host Atletico in the first leg of their Champions League quarterfinal on April 8 with the return in Madrid on April 14.

Raphinha scored twice in Barcelona’s thumping 7-2 victory over Newcastle United in the round of 16 earlier this month. — Reuters



Brazil midfielder Raphinha (11) lets go with a shot past France defender Theo Hernandez (19) during the first half at Gillette Stadium. — Imagn Images



Oklahoma City Thunder guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander (2) drives past Chicago Bulls guard Josh Giddey (3) during the first half. — Imagn Images

Thunder use 22-0 second-half run to rally past Bulls

SHAI GILGEIOUS-ALEXANDER scored 25 as the Oklahoma City Thunder used a big second-half push to beat the visiting Chicago Bulls 131-113 on Friday.

The Thunder trailed by eight with less than four minutes remaining in the third before taking over.

Oklahoma City then went on a 22-0 run that extended well into the fourth quarter to catch up and pull away from the Bulls.

After Tre Jones’ driving layup that led to a three-point play with 3:57 to go in the third, Chicago missed its next 17 shots, not hitting another until nearly four minutes into the fourth.

The Thunder (58-16) earned their 13th victory in 14 games and moved 2 1/2 games ahead of the idle San Antonio Spurs for the

top overall seed in the Western Conference with eight games remaining for Oklahoma City.

The Bulls (29-44) took their 19th loss in 24 games, knocking them out of play- in contention.

Gilgeous-Alexander wasn’t efficient, going just 8 of 24 from the field and missing all 10 of his 3-point tries, but he came up big when Oklahoma City needed it.

The reigning Most Valuable Player scored 14 in the third, with eight from the free-throw line.

Cason Wallace, who started in place of Chet Holmgren, was plenty efficient, though, scoring 21 on 8-of-11 shooting, including 5 of 7 from beyond the arc.

Holmgren missed the game due to a hip contusion.

Jalen Williams had 18 points, eight assists, and six rebounds, while Jaylin Williams had 12 points and 10 rebounds and Isaiah Hartenstein had 16 boards.

The Bulls, who announced a day earlier that Jaden Ivey and Jalen Smith would miss the remainder of the season, led for much of the game before Oklahoma City’s third-quarter finish.

Isaac Okoro scored 17 of his 20 points in the first half as Chicago led by as many as nine.

Collin Sexton led Chicago with 22 off the bench, while Jones scored 21. Sexton scored 16 of his points before the break.

After shooting 55.6 per cent in the first half, the Bulls were just 30.2 per cent from the field in the second half, including 3 of 23 from beyond the arc.

Oyarzabal double helps slick Spain to 3-0 friendly win over Serbia

Striker Mikel Oyarzabal got two superb first-half goals and substitute Victor Munoz scored on his senior international debut as Spain cruised to a 3-0 win over Serbia in a pre-World Cup friendly on Friday.

With Serbia stepping into the breach after Spain’s original plan to play Argentina in Qatar was derailed by the ongoing conflict in the Gulf, the Spaniards took the opportunity to hone their attacking play with some breathtaking movement and incisive passing that allowed them to create plenty of chances. Spain took the lead in the 16th minute with

a brilliantly constructed goal that saw Lamine Yamal feed midfielder Fermin who worked the ball on quickly for Oyarzabal to blast into the net with a fierce left-foot shot.

As Spain attacked relentlessly, Yamal received the ball on the edge of the box from Alex Baena three minutes later, but his low spinning drive struck the foot of the post and bounced away to safety.

Veljko Birmancevic had Serbia’s first shot of the game in the 21st minute but it flew harmlessly into the hands of Unai Simon, and the visitors struggled to create decent goal-scoring chances. Fermin



Serbia’s Strahinja Pavlovic in action with Spain’s Mikel Oyarzabal.

had the ball in the net in the 36th minute but the goal was ruled out due to it bouncing off his arm in the build-up as he was tackled by Aleksandar Stankovic, and Spain were denied a penalty minutes later when the ball struck the arm of defender Nikola Milenkovic in similar circumstances.

Oyarzabal netted his second goal with a tremendous shot from the edge of the box in the 44th minute and though Spain continued to dominate, it took until the 72nd minute for them to find the net again, Munoz scoring after being teed up by a brilliant back-heel from Ferran Torres. “Due to

circumstances (in the Gulf), we had to play this game but we were clear that the best way to face what is coming was to give everything and try to take the positives,” Oyarzabal said.

“I was happy to score, I wouldn’t have imagined being among the top scorers, happy for everyone who came and happy for Victor Munoz. It doesn’t matter who plays, what matters is the collective,” he added. Spain will compete in Group H of the World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico, kicking off against Cape Verde on June 15 before going on to meet Saudi Arabia and Uruguay. — Reuters

BUSINESS

SHORT TAKES



The average inflation rate increased by 1.7 per cent during the first two months of the year.

INFLATION RISES 2% IN FEBRUARY 2026

MUSCAT: The consumer price index in the Sultanate of Oman rose by 2 per cent in February 2026 compared to the same month in 2025, according to data from the National Centre for Statistics and Information.

The average inflation rate increased by 1.7 per cent during the first two months of the year. Price rises were led by miscellaneous goods and services, which surged by 13.4 per cent, followed by restaurants and hotels at 5.7 per cent; and furniture and household equipment at 3 per cent.

Food and beverages rose by 2.8 per cent, while education increased by 2.2 per cent. Other categories recorded modest increases, including health at 1.7 per cent, while transport and recreation rose by 0.2 per cent. Housing, utilities, communications and tobacco prices remained largely stable.

Within the food category, vegetables recorded the highest increase at 8.3 per cent, followed by fruits at 5.4 per cent and sugar products at 3.1 per cent. Fish, beverages and dairy products also saw moderate increases.

Regionally, Al Dhahirah Governorate recorded the highest inflation at 3 per cent, followed by Muscat Governorate at 2.5 per cent. Other governorates reported moderate increases, reflecting broadly stable inflationary trends across the Sultanate of Oman. — ONA

15M PROJECT TO DEVELOP THUMRAIT INDUSTRIAL CITY

THUMRAIT: The Public Establishment for Industrial Estates (Madayn) plans to implement a RO 15 million project to develop Thumrait Industrial City in Dhofar Governorate, covering an area of approximately 3.9 million square metres.

The project will include the development of internal road networks, water and sewage systems, stormwater drainage, fire safety infrastructure and solar-powered street lighting. It will also feature service buildings and ready-made units designed to support entrepreneurs and SMEs. — ONA

TotalEnergies deepens presence across Oman’s energy sector

CONRAD PRABHU
MUSCAT, MARCH 28

French-based global integrated energy company TotalEnergies has recorded a notable uptick in hydrocarbon production from its upstream assets in the Sultanate of Oman in 2025.

Total output climbed to around 69K barrels of oil equivalent per day (boe/d) in 2025, up from around 65K boe/d during the previous year.

The tally, corresponding to its equity entitlements, includes a liquids component (comprising black oil, condensates and natural gas liquids) of 31K boe/d and a natural gas share of 208 Mcf/d for 2025.

The figures were published in the company’s Universal Registration Document 2025, incorporating the 2025 Annual Financial Report, filed with the French Financial Markets Authority on March 27, 2026.

Oil and gas production comes from TotalEnergies’ interests in



Layout of Marsa LNG’s complex at Sohar Port.

Block 6, where it holds a 4 per cent stake and an indirect interest of 25.55 per cent in the onshore gas Block 10 through its 80 per cent stake in Marsa LNG LLC, which owns 33.19 per cent of Block 10.

This licence, located in the Greater Barik area, started production in January 2023. Gas

from this block will also feed a low-carbon LNG bunkering plant with a capacity of 1 Mt/y, starting in March 2028.

A final investment decision for this plant was announced in April 2024.

As for Block 11, where it held a 22.5 per cent interest,



Manufacturing sector reflects a cumulative growth of around 22 per cent and an average annual increase of close to 5 per cent.

Oman to secure a stronger position within global supply chains.

Alongside industrial expansion, the wholesale and retail trade sector recorded steady growth, with output increasing from RO 2.744 billion in 2021 to around RO 3.213 billion in 2025, representing cumulative growth of approximately 17 per cent and an annual rate of about 3.4 per cent.

This reflects the sector’s close linkage to domestic demand and consumption patterns, supported by improvements in the business environment and growing confidence in local markets.

Nasra bint Sultan al Habsi, Director General of Trade, said the Ministry continues to develop the commercial ecosystem by enhancing supply chain efficiency and accelerating digital transformation in trade activities. These efforts are aimed at improving service quality, stimulating consumer activity and increasing the sector’s contribution to gross domestic product.

Engineer Jassim bin Saif

— ONA

al Jadidi highlighted that integration between industrial and commercial sectors has been a key driver of growth, enabling a more resilient and interconnected economic structure capable of adapting to regional and global challenges.

In the external sector, non-oil exports rose to approximately RO 6.7 billion in 2025, compared to RO 6.2 billion in 2024, marking growth of 7.5 per cent. Re-export activity also recorded strong performance, increasing by 20.3 per cent to RO 2.056 billion.

Key export categories included chemicals, metals and related products, plastics and electrical machinery, reflecting diversification in the production base and enhanced export capabilities.

The Ministry indicated that future efforts will focus on strengthening the link between industry and export systems, improving market access and supporting innovation to boost the competitiveness of Omani products in international markets.

ADVERTORIALS

SHORTTAKES

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CHAPTERS

MUSCAT: The globally recognised Finnovex Global Series 2026 proudly announces 10 powerful, high-impact chapters across Africa, the Middle East, Europe and Southeast Asia, marking the most expansive and strategically connected series in the platform’s history.

The 2026 series is built on a “Chapter-First” philosophy: acknowledging that the financial story in each region is different. Each chapter is built around a powerful, nationally aligned theme, reflecting the regulatory ambition, digital maturity and economic priorities of its host market.

This is not a replicated conference circuit. It is a deliberately engineered global framework, where every country tells its own financial story while contributing to a shared transformation narrative unfolding chapter by chapter. Finnovex 2026 operates on the principle that local context creates global value. The chapters include:

Finnovex Rwanda 2026 will focus on financial inclusion, digital public infrastructure and strengthening cross-border payment ecosystems across East Africa.

Finnovex Oman 2026 will centre on regulatory modernisation, intelligent banking transformation and strengthening open banking frameworks.

Finnovex Egypt 2026 will highlight fintech scalability, digital lending expansion; and empowering small and medium enterprises through regulatory evolution.

Finnovex Qatar 2026 will drive discussions around sustainable finance, artificial intelligence governance and institutional digital transformation.

Finnovex South Africa 2026 will emphasise cybersecurity resilience, open finance innovation and advanced banking infrastructure development.

Finnovex Europe 2026 will examine regulatory intelligence, embedded finance evolution, digital sovereignty and cross-border compliance harmonisation.

Finnovex Saudi Arabia 2026 will align with Vision 2030 priorities, accelerating fintech investment, digital banking growth and policy-driven innovation frameworks.

Finnovex Middle East 2026 will serve as the global convergence hub, focusing on digital assets, cross-border fintech scaling and international investment connectivity.

Lincoln Corsair defines refined luxury in Oman

THE Lincoln Corsair stands as a sophisticated expression of fine luxury, now taking a prominent role in Lincoln Oman’s signature seasonal showcase. This initiative, running from February 10 to April 9, 2026, invites enthusiasts to experience a vehicle defined by artistic design and poised performance.

Accompanying the Corsair during this period is a comprehensive suite of benefits, including Free One-Year Registration, a 5-Year/100,000 km Manufacturer’s Warranty and a 5-Year/100,000 km Service package (covering 10 services), ensuring an ownership experience that is as seamless as the drive itself.

Engineering excellence is at the heart of the Corsair, powered by a turbocharged 2.0-litre engine that delivers 260 horsepower and 396 Nm of torque. This powertrain, paired with an advanced 8-speed automatic transmission and SelectShift® technology, offers effortless cruising and precise handling.

Performance is further optimised through the Lincoln Drive Modes, allowing the vehicle to adapt its traction and steering response to various road conditions, while the intelligent access system ensures the vehicle is ready for the journey the moment the driver approaches.

Driving confidence is elevated by the Lincoln Co-Pilot360™ 2.1 Vision suite, which integrates a 360-degree camera, blind-spot detection, lane-keeping assist and intelligent adaptive cruise control. These advanced systems work in harmony with the vehicle’s dynamic LED lighting and jeweled headlamps to provide a high level



Engineering excellence is at the heart of the Corsair, powered by a turbocharged 2.0-litre engine that delivers 260 horsepower and 396 Nm of torque.

of awareness and safety. To further enhance the experience, the Corsair features Lincoln’s signature illuminated entry and approach detection, greeting passengers with a sequential lighting display and a Lincoln logo welcome mat.

Lincoln Oman’s signature seasonal showcase further enhances the celebration with exclusive raffle opportunities. Visitors who participate in a test drive of the Corsair will be entered into a draw to win one of two iPhone 17s.

For those who move forward with a purchase, the Buy & Win draw offers a chance to win the sleek iPhone 17 Air, with the official prize draw scheduled for 26th April 2026. This unique combination of rewards and technological sophistication

makes the Corsair a standout choice during this festive period.

Inside, the Corsair serves as a calm, curated sanctuary defined by a horizontal layout that maximises the feeling of space. The cabin is adorned with hand-selected materials and sophisticated ambient accents, including available natural Paldao wood detailing.

Modern connectivity is led by the SYNC® 4 system and a 13.3-inch touchscreen, complemented by a 10-speaker premium audio system and dual-zone climate control.

With additional features such as a panoramic Vista Roof® and Symphonic Chimes, every detail is meticulously crafted to provide a restorative retreat for those who demand sophistication in every journey.

DoubleTree Muscat appoints new hotel manager

MUSCAT: DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Qurum is delighted to announce the appointment of Mustafa al Jendi as its new hotel manager.

With over 20 years of extensive experience in the hospitality industry, Mustafa brings a wealth of expertise in commercial strategy, operations and guest experience, having served with leading international hotel brands including Hilton, IHG and Millennium Hotels & Resorts.

Most recently serving as Commercial Director at DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Qurum, Mustafa has consistently demonstrated



Mustafa al Jendi

strong leadership, driving revenue performance, enhancing guest satisfaction and achieving outstanding results in brand quality audits

and loyalty growth.

His career is distinguished by a track record of achievements in revenue growth, market positioning and operational excellence.

Mustafa’s promotion to Hotel Manager reflects his proven leadership, dedication and deep understanding of hotel operations, developed through progressive roles across multiple international markets. In his new role, he will focus on delivering exceptional guest experiences, strengthening team performance and driving continued success for the property.

“Mustafa’s extensive experience and commitment

to excellence make him the ideal leader for DoubleTree by Hilton Muscat Qurum”, said the hotel’s executive team.

“We congratulate him on this well-deserved promotion and look forward to his continued contributions to the hotel’s growth and success”. Hilton is a leading global hospitality company with a portfolio of world-class brands comprising more than 7,200 properties and over 1.1 million rooms across 122 countries and territories.

DoubleTree by Hilton is a fast-growing, global portfolio of 661 hotels with more than 151,000 rooms across 52 countries and territories.

Pact signed to establish Oman’s first enterprise command centre

MUSCAT: Dynatrace, the leading AI-powered observability platform, announced that Bank Muscat, the Sultanate of Oman’s largest bank by market share, has deployed the Dynatrace platform to build the country’s first enterprise Command Centre in the banking sector, that will strengthen operational resilience and accelerate incident response across critical digital banking services.

Since deploying the Dynatrace platform, the Command Centre has reduced mean time to detect (MTTD) by consolidating over 20 monitoring tools into a single unified observability platform, fundamentally changing how the bank detects and responds to incidents.

To address the growing complexity of its critical digital banking services, Bank Muscat partnered with Dynatrace to establish a centralised Command Centre operating model built on



Bank Muscat partnered with Dynatrace to establish a centralised Command Centre operating model built on AI-powered observability and real-time, AI-driven insights.

AI-powered observability and real-time, AI-driven insights.

The Command Centre provides a single operational view spanning core banking systems, payment and channel services; and customer-facing digital applications, leveraging AI-assisted analysis to replace fragmented monitoring with coordinated, real-time service assurance and enabling the bank

to move from reactive incident handling to faster, more proactive operations.

“The Command Centre has enabled us to operate from a single, unified data view that empowers our teams to anticipate issues before they escalate. We’ve shifted from reactive incident response to proactive service assurance; strengthening resilience, enhancing

customer experience and delivering measurable improvements.

This is not just an operational upgrade; it’s a foundation for smarter, faster and more reliable service delivery in the future, with a strong commitment to provide better services for our customers every day”, said Mohammed bin Saud al Naamani, Deputy General Manager Business Applications at Bank Muscat.

The newly launched Command Centre, based at Bank Muscat’s headquarters, reflects the bank’s commitment to operational excellence through a centralised, disciplined operating model.

A number of specialists, including shift leads, observability engineers, platform specialists and dedicated automation and analytics teams, work alongside application and infrastructure groups through defined incident management and proactive service processes.

The model is designed to build

and retain internal capability, reducing dependency on external vendors and strengthening long-term operational resilience.

Since launching the Command Centre, Bank Muscat has achieved measurable improvement in operational performance, including:

- Reducing mean time to detect incidents to five minutes or less, an improvement of more than 80%.
- Significantly reducing alert noise, enabling teams to diagnose and resolve issues faster during critical periods such as month-end processing and payday transactions.
- Standardising detection and response, freeing capacity previously spent on reactive firefighting and redirecting resources toward preventative engineering and automation.
- Reducing reliance on third-party support, while strengthening internal operational resilience capabilities.

SHORTTAKES



Oman's participation reflects its commitment to strengthening multilateral trade cooperation.

OMAN REINFORCES COMMITMENT TO GLOBAL TRADE SYSTEM

YAOUNDÉ: The Sultanate of Oman is participating in the 14th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), hosted in Yaoundé, Republic of Cameroon, with wide participation from trade ministers of member states.

The Omani delegation is headed by Pankaj Kanaksi Gokaldas Khimji, Adviser for External Trade and International Cooperation at the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; and includes Ambassador Idris bin Abdulrahman al Khanjari, Permanent Representative of Oman to the United Nations and other international organisations in Geneva, as well as Faisal bin Ali al Hinai, Deputy Head of Mission to the WTO.

Discussions at the conference covered key issues such as WTO reform, agriculture, fisheries subsidies, e-commerce, development and investment facilitation. Khimji affirmed that Oman's participation reflects its commitment to strengthening multilateral trade cooperation and supporting a balanced global trading system, particularly in light of geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainty and their impact on trade and investment flows.

He highlighted the WTO's role in promoting inclusive trade and reiterated Oman's support for a rules-based system grounded in transparency, fairness and openness. Ambassador Al Khanjari noted that Oman's accession to the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement marks a significant step in supporting global efforts to curb harmful subsidies and protect marine ecosystems. He stressed the importance of advancing negotiations and ensuring continued technical support for developing countries.

Faisal al Hinai underscored Oman's backing for comprehensive WTO reform, including restoring an effective dispute settlement mechanism and ensuring inclusive participation. He also emphasised support for integrating the Investment Facilitation for Development initiative into the WTO framework. On the sidelines, the delegation held bilateral meetings to expand trade and investment ties. — ONA

APSR to review progress, outline new projects

MUSCAT: The Authority for Public Services Regulation (APSR) will hold its annual media meeting next Tuesday (March 31) to review its key achievements and future plans across regulated sectors, including electricity, water, sanitation and sustainable energy.

The meeting will present a comprehensive review of projects completed under the Tenth Five-Year Plan, highlighting their role in improving service efficiency and reliability. It will also outline projects planned for the Eleventh Five-Year Plan, focusing on regulatory development, operational performance, energy transition and national



The meeting will present a comprehensive review of projects completed under the Tenth Five-Year Plan.

CONSUMER GLOOM

US sentiment hits three-month low



US consumer sentiment fell to a three-month low in March, as Middle East conflict fuelled inflation fears and clouded the outlook. The decline was broad-based, with sharper drops among wealthier households.

Oil prices have surged over 50%, lifting petrol costs and denting equities. Economists warn higher fuel costs and weaker markets could curb spending and slow growth. — Reuters

TRADE TALKS

EU, US advance minerals cooperation talks



The EU and US agreed to deepen cooperation on critical minerals following a "very positive" meeting between trade officials at the WTO gathering in Cameroon. Tariffs were also discussed amidst lingering tensions.

EU lawmakers advanced legislation linked to last year's Turnberry deal, which set a 15% tariff on most EU goods, helping avert a wider transatlantic trade dispute. — Reuters

DIGITAL TRADE

India nods flexibility on e-commerce tariffs



India has indicated willingness to support a two-year extension of the WTO moratorium on tariffs for electronic transmissions, marking a shift in stance. The move comes despite earlier calls for reconsideration.

The United States, however, prefers a permanent extension. Businesses warn that failing to renew the agreement could introduce uncertainty and disrupt global digital trade flows. — Reuters

New power agreements to strengthen sector outlook

ENERGY

companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange are set to sign new long-term power purchase agreements with Nama Power and Water Procurement Company, a move expected to enhance operational sustainability, strengthen financial stability and ensure steady revenue streams for the sector.

Al Suwadi Power, Al Batinah Power and Al Anqa Power confirmed in separate disclosures that they have accepted letters of assignment issued earlier this month and are currently working with Nama to complete procedures for signing the agreements. The new contracts will run for 15 years, extending supply commitments well into the 2040s.

Under the proposed arrangements, agreements with Al Suwadi Power and Al Batinah Power will come into effect on April 1, 2028, following the expiry of existing contracts and will remain valid until March 31, 2043. Meanwhile, the agreement with Al Anqa Power is scheduled to commence on April 1, 2029 and continue until March 31, 2044.

The agreements are part of broader efforts to enhance the reliability of the electricity sector, particularly during peak demand periods, while addressing rising consumption driven by economic growth, expanding industrial activity and population increases. They also align with the country's push to expand renewable



There are 12 energy companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange operating in electricity and water production.

energy capacity, including solar and wind projects, as part of initiatives to reduce carbon emissions.

Electricity production in Oman has shown consistent growth, rising by around 5 per cent to exceed 51,000 gigawatt-hours (GWh) in 2025, compared to approximately 49,000 GWh in 2024 and 43,900 GWh in 2023. This upward trend reflects increasing demand across residential, commercial and industrial segments.

The sector has also benefited from a series of recently signed agreements between Nama and major producers, including Sohar Power Company, Barka Water and Power Company and Sembcorp Salalah Power and Water Company. These

agreements have contributed to improved operational stability and enhanced financial performance.

Sohar Power, which signed a nine-year agreement in December 2024, reported the restart of its open-cycle gas turbines and expects to complete repayment of primary debt this year, paving the way for shareholder returns in the future.

Sembcorp Salalah indicated that its new agreement will support long-term value creation and business stability, while Barka Water and Power confirmed timely debt servicing of RO 6.8 million in 2025 and successful completion of performance tests under its current contract.

There are currently 12 energy companies listed on the Muscat Stock Exchange operating in electricity and water production. Preliminary data shows that these firms recorded combined net profits of RO 107.6 million in 2025, compared to RO 111.6 million in 2024.

Phoenix Power led the sector with profits of RO 26 million, followed by Sembcorp Salalah at RO 23.3 million and Sohar Power at RO 16.7 million.

Market capitalisation of energy companies rose to RO 809.3 million by the end of 2025, up from RO 461.3 million in 2014, reflecting strong investor demand, improved performance and positive expectations for the sector's long-term prospects.

— ONA

CREDIT OMAN INSURES 390M IN TRADE

MUSCAT: Credit Oman reported growth in its operations in 2025, with total insured exports and domestic sales reaching RO 390.2 million, up 3.67 per cent from RO 376.4 million in 2024. The firm recorded a profit of RO 258,200, funded entirely through its own resources.

Insured export sales amounted to RO 210 million, covering sectors such as construction materials, agriculture, petrochemicals and manufacturing, while insured domestic sales reached RO 180 million.

Acting CEO Haitham bin Abdullah al Yaqoubi said the organisation continues to align its strategies with national economic goals, supporting export growth and enhancing competitiveness.

He noted that total premiums reached over RO 1 million, while the number of policyholders rose by 15.7 per cent to 88. It also expanded its investment portfolio to RO 18.3 million, with total assets exceeding RO 20 million. — ONA

OPINION

The state of the Omani economy amidst the US–Iran war



DR HILAL
AL SAWAI

The writer is local content, sustainability and innovation expert

WITH the increasing tensions between the United States and Iran, the economic outlook of the Gulf region has changed, putting Oman in a particularly complicated situation. Although the current state of the economy is influenced by conflict-related uncertainty impacting energy prices, trade and the geopolitics of the region, Oman has a hybrid economic structure and a diplomatic posture with both vulnerabilities and opportunities. To understand the Omani economy in this context, it is necessary to analyse the complexities of oil, geography of trade, fiscal resilience and regional security. The most notable factor determining the Oman economy during the ongoing conflict is the increasing price of oil. War has caused significant disruption to the global energy markets, with global institutions warning the situation is likely to cause prolonged inflationary pressure and is a significant threat to the global economy. For Oman, increased prices of oil provide temporary financial relief. Rating agencies indicate the country is in a good position to take advantage of increased hydrocarbon revenues as the price of oil rises over \$100 per barrel due to supply concerns. This increased revenue will improve the fiscal situation, allow the state to finance its deficit and sustain government expenditure, all of which are a priority for an economy in the midst of structural reforms and economic diversification. The Oman economy’s geographical advantages offer distinguishing features

to the country’s economic resilience. Oman is less exposed to the direct effects of maritime disruptions and is more economically resilient than other GCC states. Oman is much less exposed to the direct effects of maritime disruptions than other GCC states since other GCC states primarily utilise the Strait of Hormuz while Oman utilises the Indian Ocean, which is less exposed to blockades and attacks on shipping routes. Oman is less exposed to the worst effects of the war on trade than its neighbours. Oman is still impacted indirectly by the global trade volatility and increased shipping insurances, which directly adversely affect Oman. These risks include the possibility of an attack on Oman’s own territory and the resulting economic and operational impact on the country from an attack and loss of invested capital. The risks include attacks and associated economic impacts on Oman from overseas investment and the potential loss of invested capital as the regional instability persists. The risks include the loss of reputation potential of the Oman region as an investment and tourism destination. Oman’s role as a long-term intermediary diplomat between Washington and Tehran complicates the economic picture of Oman as a whole. Oman’s strategy has been to maintain an active role in the maritime security space and encourage dialogue to secure a strategy of political neutrality and balanced economic activity.

War has caused significant disruption to the global energy markets, with global institutions warning the situation is likely to cause prolonged inflationary pressure and is a significant threat to the global economy.

However, the increased tension between countries in the region and little prospect of peacemaking have increased the Gulf market uncertainty and the economic outlook remains gloomy. Oman’s role of intermediary diplomat expands Oman’s potential but also increases the potential reputational and strategic risks. At the macroeconomic level, the effects of the conflict extend beyond oil. Increased prices for energy will change the patterns of international trade, inflation and the flow of investments, especially in the case of developing economies. For Oman, which is integrated in international supply chains and relies on external investments for its diversification projects, such volatility will limit the pace of growth. Furthermore, a more prolonged period of high oil prices will postpone the necessary economic reforms by reinforcing the dependence on oil and gas revenue and delaying the needed structural changes. The US–Iran war places Oman in an economically contradictory situation. Increased oil prices mean more revenue for the country but less trade as the war creates a buffer. This makes more oil revenue and boosted trade a temporary solution. The war creates an immediate protective trade system but as conflict persists, it makes commerce incredibly dangerous and creates a trade deficit, defensive system. Oman will only experience economic success with a quick resolution of the conflict, a consistent energy system and continued improvements to trade and foreign investments.

Storing Cold: Could ice-based cooling reshape Oman’s energy demand?

NAJAH AL RIYAMI

In a region where temperatures regularly exceed 45°C, cooling is not a luxury. It is an essential service that defines daily life, urban design and national energy demand. Yet as electricity consumption continues to surge during peak summer months, a quieter innovation is gaining attention for its ability to reduce pressure on the grid, not by generating more energy, but by rethinking how cooling is delivered.

Ice-based cooling, also known as thermal energy storage, offers a simple but effective solution. Instead of relying entirely on real-time air conditioning during the hottest hours of the day, the system shifts part of the cooling process to off-peak periods. Water is frozen overnight using electricity when demand is lower and the stored ice is then used to cool buildings during the day. The principle is straightforward. Conventional air conditioning systems consume the most electricity precisely when temperatures and demand are at their highest. Ice storage systems reverse this dynamic. By producing and storing “cold” in advance, they reduce the need for intensive energy use during peak hours, easing strain on power infrastructure. Globally, the technology has already been deployed in commercial buildings, airports and district cooling systems. In some cases, it has reduced peak cooling energy demand by up to 30 to 40 per cent. For utilities, this is not just an efficiency gain. It is a way to defer costly investments in additional generation capacity that would otherwise be required to meet short-lived peaks in demand. For Oman, the relevance is immediate. Cooling accounts for a significant share of electricity consumption, particularly in residential and commercial sectors. During summer, peak demand is driven almost entirely by air conditioning. As urban expansion continues and new developments emerge across Muscat and beyond, this demand is expected to grow further. Ice-based cooling introduces a practical pathway to manage that growth. Large-scale developments, including mixed-use districts, hotels and commercial complexes, could integrate thermal storage systems into their design. By producing cooling at night and using it during the day, these developments can reduce peak electricity loads while maintaining comfort levels. The approach also aligns well with Oman’s broader energy transition strategy.

Corridor to platform: How Oman can make trade pay

OMAN’S East-West advantage is real. But geography, by itself, does not create prosperity. A country can sit on major shipping lanes, build modern ports and sign market-opening agreements, yet still capture only a fraction of the value moving through it. The real question is not whether Oman is well placed between East and West. It is whether that position can be turned into exports, jobs and investment that stay in the economy. Oman already has part of the framework. The US-Oman Free Trade Agreement entered into force on January 1, 2009, giving Omani goods and investors long-standing access under a clear rules-based structure. More recently, Oman and India signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement in Muscat on December 18, 2025 and it was ratified by Royal Decree in February 2026. Oman also benefits from its position within the GCC, which gives it a wider regional trade setting even as the bloc continues to deepen external economic ties. But access is not the same as outcomes. Trade agreements open doors. They do not decide what walks through them. That depends on what Oman can produce competitively, move reliably and sell at the right standard into the right markets. This is where the real distinction lies: between being a transit point and becoming a trade platform. A transit point earns from passage. A platform earns because trade begins to generate value inside the country. Goods are assembled, adapted, labelled, tested, repaired, financed, certified, insured and redistributed before they move on. The country does not simply watch trade pass through. It captures a larger share of the margin around it. That is the deeper opportunity



Success should be measured in non-oil export growth, the number of active exporting firms, the sophistication of re-export activity and the number of trade-linked jobs created.



QASIM
AL MAASHANI

The author is the head of the Business and Politics department at Oman Observer

But access is not the same as outcomes. Trade agreements open doors. They do not decide what walks through them. That depends on what Oman can produce competitively, move reliably and sell at the right standard into the right markets.

for Oman. The margin is not in the container crossing the border. The margin is in what happens to that container before it departs. That does not always require heavy industry or grand new slogans. In many cases, the quickest gains come from practical trade-linked activity: packaging, light assembly, maintenance and repair, spare parts logistics, cold-chain handling, compliance support, re-export processing and after-sales services. These are not glamorous sectors, but they are exactly the kinds of activities that turn logistics into income and location into a business model. If Oman wants connectivity to become a stronger non-oil growth engine, three shifts matter. First, trade policy must move from broad frameworks to sector priorities. Every agreement should lead to a shortlist of sectors where Oman has a realistic chance to compete. Which products can meet US market requirements under existing rules? Which industries can scale faster under the Oman-India CEPA? Which Omani firms can win not only on price, but on reliability, standards and delivery? Unless trade policy reaches that level of detail, agreements remain politically useful but economically underused.

Second, export support must become more targeted and more disciplined. Preferential access means little if firms cannot finance orders, secure certification, manage compliance or deliver at the required scale. Support should be tied to actual export performance: contract-linked finance, standards support, export credit tools and incentives linked to market entry, volume growth and local value addition. The goal should not be to subsidise activity. It should be to back firms that can convert access into sales. Third, Oman should judge infrastructure by what it produces, not by what it contains. Ports, free zones and industrial estates are not the finish line. They are the foundation. The real test is whether they generate clusters of value-adding activity around them: suppliers, service providers, converters, repair operators, distributors and exporters. Success should be measured in non-oil export growth, the number of active exporting firms, the sophistication of re-export activity and the number of trade-linked jobs created. Square metres and ribbon-cuttings are not enough. One point cuts across all of this: the private sector cannot be treated as a passenger. Businesses know where the real friction lies — in costs, paperwork, standards, shipping schedules, customer requirements and delivery times. If policy is designed without that commercial feedback, Oman risks building access on paper while underperforming in practice. That is the real danger. Oman could remain well located, well connected and still under-monetised if too much trade continues to pass through the country without generating enough production, services and jobs within it. Oman’s East-West advantage is real. The question is whether it becomes a national business model. The choice is not theoretical. It is practical.

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GHOST OF THE DESERT

THE ELUSIVE ARABIAN SAND CAT



NAJAH AL RIYAMI

In the vast, shifting landscapes of Oman’s deserts, where temperatures swing between scorching days and cool nights, one of the region’s most elusive inhabitants moves almost entirely unseen.

The Arabian sand cat, a small, nocturnal predator perfectly adapted to life in arid environments, is among the least observed wild felines in the Arabian Peninsula. Rarely encountered and even more rarely documented, it has earned a reputation as the ‘ghost of the desert’.

Unlike larger and more widely recognised species, the Arabian sand cat does not rely on strength or speed alone. Its survival is built on adaptation. With thick fur covering the soles of its feet, it can move silently across hot sand while protecting itself from extreme ground temperatures. Its pale, sandy coat provides natural camouflage, allowing it to blend almost seamlessly into its surroundings.

The species is primarily found in remote desert regions, including parts of central and southern Oman. However, its exact population remains unknown. While globally listed as Least Concern, populations across the Arabian Peninsula are believed to be declining, a reflection of both habitat pressure and the difficulty of studying a species that is rarely seen.

What is known is that the sand cat plays an important role within its ecosystem.

Feeding on small rodents, reptiles and insects, it contributes to maintaining ecological balance in environments that are often perceived as barren but are, in reality, delicately structured systems of life. Individuals can travel several kilometres in a single night in search of prey, navigating vast stretches of desert without reliance on permanent water sources. Despite its resilience, the Arabian sand cat faces growing pressures. Habitat disturbance, expansion of human activity into desert areas and the increasing reach of infrastructure development are gradually altering the landscapes it depends on.

In some cases, accidental encounters with vehicles and competition with other predators have also been noted as emerging concerns.

Conservation efforts across the region have begun to focus more closely on lesser-known species such as the sand cat, recognising that biodiversity protection extends beyond flagship animals.

In Oman, broader environmental strategies aimed at preserving desert ecosystems indirectly support the survival of such species, even if they remain largely out of sight. There is also a growing role for technology in bridging the knowledge gap. Camera traps, satellite monitoring and AI-assisted tracking are enabling researchers to capture rare glimpses of species that would otherwise go unnoticed. These tools are gradually building a clearer picture of where and how the sand cat lives, offering insights that could inform future conservation strategies. Yet, the challenge remains one of visibility. Unlike more prominent wildlife, the Arabian sand cat does not attract widespread attention. Its survival depends not only on scientific understanding but also on a broader awareness of the value of desert ecosystems and the life they sustain.

QUICK FEATURES



SELFIE TIME

A couple poses for a ‘selfie’ photo on a phone along a beach by the Caspian Sea coast in Sorkhrud in Iran’s northern Mazandaran province on Saturday. — **AFP**



WORLD PREMIERE

Cast member Donald Glover attends the World Premiere of the film ‘The Super Mario Galaxy Movie’ in Kyoto, Japan, on Saturday. — **Reuters**



EASTER EGGS

An employee with a paint brush corrects the colour on painted eggs at the production facility of the Beham egg dyeing plant in Ursberg, Bavaria, southern Germany, on Saturday. — **AFP**

INSTA PICKS



Pool in the mountain



Rocky seashore

SHARE A SLICE OF YOUR LIFE

We select photos daily for our Instagram Top Picks of the Day. The rules are simple. Follow us on Instagram. Upload your photos. Tag us and use #OmanObserver and #BeAnObserver.

BAIT AL GHASHAM AWARD
OPENS FOR ENTRIES



Applications are now open for the fourth edition of the Bait Al Ghasham Award, organised by Dar Arab International for Translation, reaffirming its role as a leading Arab initiative supporting Arabic literature and promoting its global reach through English translation.

Since its launch in 2023, the award has contributed to strengthening cultural exchange and fostering connections between communities.

Submissions for this cycle will remain open until July 31, with applicants required to complete an online form and submit the necessary documents.

The award adopts a comprehensive model that goes beyond recognition, extending to the full production of winning works — from translation and editing to publishing and distribution — ensuring their accessibility to English-speaking readers and enhancing the global presence of Arabic literature.

The total prize value stands at £70,000, including cash awards as well as full coverage of

translation, editing, publishing and marketing costs.

The award is divided into three main categories: the Translators category for Arabic literary works (published in or after 1970) that have not yet been translated into English; the Authors category for unpublished Arabic works, which will be published in Arabic and then translated and released internationally; and the Omani Publications category for published Omani works to be translated and distributed globally.

Eligible genres include novels, short story collections, memoirs and biographies.

Funded by the Bait Al Ghasham Foundation and administered by Dar Arab International for Translation, the annual award aims to bridge the gap in translating Arabic literature into English.

Previous editions have attracted strong global participation and featured judging panels comprising leading academics and translation experts. — ONA



An olive ridley sea turtle hatchling moves on a beach after emerging from its nest. — AFP

Gabon battles for baby sea turtles’ survival

CÉLINE CLERY

SMALL enough to fit in the palm of your hand, newly hatched sea turtles emerged on a Gabonese beach to embark on the treacherous 10-metre (33-foot) scramble across the sand to the ocean.

“The survival rate for turtles is one in 1,000”, Francois Boussamba, a Gabonese turtle expert and head of the NGO Aventures Sans Frontieres (Adventures Without Borders), said, scouring for nests.

Conservationists from NGOs and the national parks agency patrol Gabon’s beaches daily during the nesting season to protect the turtles’ nests.

Those under threat are moved to a hatchery, a fenced enclosure near the sea, where the eggs are kept safe until they are ready to hatch.

On Pongara National Park’s white sandy beaches, about 30 minutes by boat from the capital Libreville, conditions are optimal for nesting: wild coastline, a favourable equatorial climate and an open ocean beach with gentle slopes, ideal for the females.

But dangers lurk. Nests are threatened by coastal erosion due to encroaching sea levels, or myriad predators such as crabs and birds that prevent the eggs from reaching their 60-day incubation period, Boussamba said.

“The chances of survival are tiny”, he said.

In Libreville, every

Gabon has the highest nesting density on the continent, with an average of 30,000 to 40,000 nests per year, across all species. And the country is the world’s leading nesting site for leatherback turtles, a species threatened according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature

morning around 7:00 am, volunteers from the Project Turtles Tahiti Gabon association crisscross the beach and check the nests in the hatchery.

After one has hatched, the baby turtles have to be moved so they can reach the sea — but they are never put straight into the water.

“They need to build up their muscles so they can swim in the ocean”, volunteer Clemence said.

Four species of turtles — green, olive ridley, hawksbill and leatherback — come to nest along Gabon’s 900 km of coastline from October to April.

It has the highest nesting density on the African continent, according to the US-based NGO Wildlife Conservation Society.

Gabon is the world’s leading nesting site for the leatherback turtle, the largest of the species and listed as threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

In addition to predators, sea turtles are also threatened by human activities, from plastic pollution to industrial fishing and poachers.

By watching over the eggs, the rangers in Pongara help ensure “the survival of this species”, Edouard Moussavou, Pongara park’s deputy director, said.

Since 2013, Gabon’s conservation efforts had received funding from the United States, notably through the US Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency responsible for biodiversity.

“If there are turtles,

it means our ecosystem is sound and healthy”, Boussamba said.

But since the suspension of grants by the administration of US President Donald Trump, “turtle monitoring activities have stopped or slowed down drastically”, Moussavou said.

“There will be fewer staff, less data and that really creates difficulties for us”, he said.

Additionally, there have been delays in paying the staff of the National Agency for National Parks (ANPN), which manages the country’s 13 parks, according to Sosthene Ndong Engonga, secretary-general of the National Union of Gabonese Ecoguards.

The around 580 eco-rangers regularly go unpaid.

“Even when there is money, we have to make a big fuss to get our salaries”, he said, adding he battled with the treasury last month for back pay.

The eco-rangers, who are crucial for the conservation of Gabon’s biodiversity, face having “to give everything up”, Engonga warned. “We have expenses we can no longer cover”, he said.

On Pongara beach, 40-year-old Alain Banguiya carries out night patrols, hoping to see a leatherback turtle emerge from the water to lay her eggs in the sand.

An eco-ranger since 2015, he has not been paid for two months but says that giving up is out of the question.

“We have a duty to fight to the end, to keep our spirits up”, he said. “Despite the obstacles, we stay the course: conservation”. — AFP

FEATURES



KHALED ABDUL MALAK

GOD has endowed Oman with a diverse flora, where craggy hills mingle with the plains and the sea, featuring breathtaking plants and trees that captivate visitors with their exquisite beauty and diversity.

During my numerous trips in the mountains, wadis and beaches of this stunning country, I encountered many exceptional plants and trees.

In Al Jabal Al Akhdhar, I could admire the majestic multi-century-old juniper trees (Aalaalan), Olea Europaea (Aatm), Sideroxylon mascatense (Boot) and Acacia Gerardii (Talh).

The juniper tree, Juniperus polycarpus, commonly known as Persian juniper, is a species native to western Asia.

Some authorities classify it as a subspecies or variety of Juniperus excelsa. It has extremely hard wood that people in the past used in the construction of their homes and structures of trails in the mountains. The juniper's lifespan is between 350 and 750 years and can rarely reach a thousand years.

Around 20 years ago, I had the chance to meet a young scientific woman from New Zealand working for EarthWatch who came to Oman to study the juniper trees in Al Jabal Al Akhdhar.

She told me that the oldest one was probably more than a thousand years old but unfortunately was dying because the road built next to it acted like a dam, collecting water after the rain and causing the

From the heights of Al Jabal Al Akhdhar to the rugged Al Hajar Mountains, Oman's ancient junipers, wild olives and fragrant acacias reveal a rich natural heritage — both enduring and in need of care



rotting of its roots!

The juniper tree is one of the perennial trees of Oman and can reach more than 20 metres in height with a trunk exceeding 1.5 metres in diameter. The smoke of the burning juniper berries repels insects and reptiles.

The Boot, Sideroxylon mascatense, is a perennial shrub or a small tree, usually growing 7 to 10 metres tall and occasionally recorded as a medium-sized tree up to 15 metres high.

We can also find it in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Sideroxylon mascatense was formerly the characteristic tree in the montane semi-evergreen woodlands of the Musandam Peninsula in northernmost Oman and the United Arab Emirates, but livestock grazing and over-harvesting timber and firewood have degraded the peninsula's montane woodlands.

These trees can be found in Al

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Jabal Al Akhdhar and Jabal Shams. During the first months of summer, they produce small dark purple to black berries with a maximum diameter of 1 cm, containing a big seed inside and a delicious sweet flesh. People living in the mountains sell them on the side of the road during the season.

Olea Europaea (Aatm) is also a perennial tree that produces very small olives that are not edible. Omanis use the wood of these olive trees to make their traditional sticks.

In Hail Al Masbit, I saw massive Aatm trees more than 10 metres tall with a span of not less than 12 metres!

Acacia Gerardii (Talh) is another tree found in the Al Hajar mountains. The tree blooms in late spring and the beginning of summer, so one can smell its delicious perfume from a distance and the bees produce delicious honey from the flowers.

HAPPY **ENDING**

STRANDED
HUMPBACK ESCAPES
BALTIC SHORE



The humpback whale, which was stranded for days on Germany's Baltic Sea coast

FELIX MUSCHEN

The humpback whale that freed itself early on Friday from a sandbank off of Germany's Baltic Sea coast is now heading out of the Bay of Lübeck, a marine scientist said.

Stephanie Gross from the Institute for Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife Research (ITAW) said the marine mammal was on course to leave the bay.

A colleague of hers was in an inflatable boat directly alongside the 12 to 15-metre-long whale, which is also being accompanied about 300 metres off the coast by a coastguard vessel and several boats, Gross said.

No transmitter was attached to the whale because its skin was too badly diseased.

The whale was stuck in shallow waters off Timmendorfer Beach since early on Monday, drawing heavy media attention.

What matters now is that the whale stays in open water and swims into the North Sea if possible, biologist Robert Marc Lehmann said.

But the large mammal is still not home free, as its release from the sandbank is not a rescue but only a small step in the right direction, he said. It would only be home once it reached the Atlantic, Lehmann added.

Lehmann said the whale had been able to swim into deeper water through a channel dug out by a floating excavator. The biologist had snorkelled out to the whale and tried to guide it through the trench.

Politicians had pledged help

"I am simply just glad", said the mayor of Timmendorfer Beach, Sven Partheil-Böhnke. Schleswig-Holstein Premier Daniel Günther also expressed his joy at the rescue and thanked the volunteers on site, WDR public broadcaster reported.

Günther had pledged the state's support after visiting the site to assess the situation. Ahead of the whale's release, he said that the northern German state would provide up to two boats to help guide the animal through the Baltic Sea and prevent it from running aground again.

"Let's see whether we have to accompany it and help it out. We offered it, but for now (the whale) can no longer be seen on the beach", Günther said, adding that the priority was for the marine mammal to find "the right way" out.

For Timmendorf on the Baltic Sea coast, the unprecedented multi-day rescue operation involving excavators and divers has thus come to a happy ending.

Efforts to free the whale had continued for days. An initial attempt using a small suction dredger failed on Tuesday. On Thursday, rescuers dug a trench with a floating dredger to create a path back to deeper water.

Metre by metre, the whale moved through the channel on Thursday evening. A larger excavator was later brought in from land after an embankment was built to allow the heavy machinery to reach the site.

The animal appeared more active than in previous days. In the evening, helpers also tried to encourage it with noise — by honking, drumming or shouting. The animal itself also repeatedly emitted aloud humming sound.

By nightfall, only a few metres remained to deeper water, Mayor Partheil-Böhnke said, but the operation was suspended due to darkness. Overnight, the whale managed to free itself.

Not native to the Baltic Sea

Why the whale had appeared off the coast is still unclear. Gross from the ITAW had said that perhaps the animal was ill or injured or perhaps simply exhausted. It is also possible that it entered the shallow waters by chance. — **dpa**